

Acts 4

A Good sports dynasty is hard to accomplish. A sports dynasty is a team that wins championships over and over again for years. You see it rarely, Michael Jordan and his Bulls in the 90s, and the insufferable, cheating patriots in football - finally that's over! (And yes, maybe I am a little bitter) They are so rare because, first of all, winning a championship at all is hard. You have to have the right players and staff and those players and staff have to sacrifice. They have to share the spotlight, share the salary cap hit, share the ball. All things that impact their fame, livelihood, and legacy. Most of the time a team wins a championship, they celebrate, of course, but then, they begin to think, "Well, I got my championship ring, now it sure would be nice to get a bit more salary, or another endorsement, or to be used a bit more in the offense." Or maybe they just decide they've reached the championship milestone so its time to play for a team a little closer to home, or with that coach they know and love. And before you know it, because the team becomes secondary, because of ego and reasons relating to the individual self, that championship team looks a lot different.

In our First reading from Acts we have a championship team put together. The early Church is unifying around the apostles and their testimony of the Risen Lord Jesus. And they are sacrificing, unifying, working together, donating, and they are accomplishing great things in ministry and in service.

But if we would note the first word in your English Bible after our reading today, we would see: “but.” Acts 5 verse 1 throws a damper on the championship team of Acts 4. Ananias and Sapphira sell some land but keep some of the proceeds. And just like that Ego and service-of-self begins to win out over the “team spirit,” and there is scandal, there is heartache, there is judgment.

It isn't just sports where our own selfish pride and ego bring about strife, conflict, and pain. It's every single human institution, because those institutions are made up of selfish, sinful people like us. I mean look at society. One extreme side of the aisle says to the needy, “I don't need to help them, get a job you lazy bum, or go back to where you came from.” Whereas the Bible has a lot to say about helping the neighbor, needy, and refugee. But the other, again, extreme side of the aisle says, “If we had the right government programs that forced us to share our wealth and food there wouldn't be any poor!” As if they have forgotten that its never the politicians in the bread lines, starving under communism, it's the poor. And they look at verses like these or Jesus feeding the 5000 and want to say that this is a prescription for how to do government or something. When in reality we can say both that, “yes we ought selflessly share and give service,” while at the same time saying, “in this world of sin it shouldn't surprise us that we will never ever be able to legislate that without corruption.”

But my point is not just to offend both sides of the aisle, but also, once more to show how human sinfulness and selfishness infects everything in this broken world. Even the Church of Jesus. Now, don't get me wrong, the Church is not a manmade institution, it is Christ's Church and he is and remains sinless, and praise God for that, because without Him, the gates of hell win the victory. But that does not change the fact that the Church here on earth is full of sinners as you and I just confessed.

We see it in Acts as the serenity of Easter fades and gives way to selfishness. And does that not happen in our lives? The joy of Easter fades, "that was a fun Sunday, but now its back to business." And back to being upset about the color of the carpet or being cheated 20 bucks by your neighbor. Back to having lots of criticisms but no desire to help. Back to having too many other important things to do in life than hear and receive the gifts of God. Back to the rumor mill. Back to sinful pastors like me preaching the good news of Jesus, but being so incapable of living up to that Good Shepherd.

So what do we do with this selfishness that steals the joy of easter from us? What do we do when we look inside and see pride, and anger, and bitterness, and not the fruit of the Spirit of God? We try to whip ourselves into shape, we get mad at ourselves. We try the self help stuff. Do we just need a good coach or something to recapture the championship mentality?

I don't think so. Because in our reading we see what changed the people of God, and we know what changed us to give us such joy last week. The Risen Lord. The people of God were changed by the eyewitness testimony of the resurrection.

Which leads to this question: Does a guy coming back from the dead change anything? Like actually change something in your life. If Jesus were not raised would your life look the same? If you were not a Christian would your life look the same, outside of an hour or two on Sundays? I hope so. The resurrection sure seemed to change the people in Acts 4.

Now does it mean we all have to sell our houses and join a communal order? I don't think so, but should it impact how we spend some of our money? I think it might.

Does the death and resurrection of Jesus change the way you view others? That person with no job, or that person on the other side of the aisle. Or that person we can't stand? I think it should. They are someone God made and died for. Perhaps we can give that some thought, and perhaps some mercy as God has shown us.

Which reminds me: Does the death and resurrection of Jesus change the way you view yourself? I think it should. We too are made by God, with meaning and purpose, and we too, though sinfully selfish and unclean are invited to draw near to

God, be washed clean in the blood of Christ, and celebrate the victory won for us in the resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection promised to all His people of faith.

Which reminds me: Does the death and resurrection of Jesus change the way God looks at you? I know it does. How many things keep us up at night, what sins, mistakes, doubts, fears, and broken relationships? Oh, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the propitiation of our sins! Fear not before the Father, because Jesus pleads your case and his death and resurrection is on your account. So we can be honest about our many sins, but can be brave to move forward knowing that life eternal is real and is ours based on the resurrection of Jesus, attested by eyewitnesses and proclaimed to us in truth.

That changes things. It may not change your views on sports. It may not eradicate the sin that infects our institutions, and yes, as we see even in acts, sin is still here among us – the devil works harder on us. But he cannot overcome the power of the resurrection, may we continually hear that good news to strengthen and change us, and may that change in our lives flow forth in acts of service, mercy, and truth.

Until the day when his resurrection hope is fully realized and we are changed fully and completely on the last day where the celebration really begins and will never fade. In Jesus' name: Amen.