

Acts 4 Easter 4

Have you ever had a problem that just wouldn't go away? Maybe it was medical, that headache that just wouldn't respond to anything. That rash that no dermatologist could figure out. Maybe it was a co-worker that was just there every day doing that thing that you couldn't stand. That strained relationship that, no matter what you tried or did, just got worse. Problems are bad enough, but problems that don't go away: those lead so quickly to feelings of frustration and hopelessness.

So have a little sympathy for the chief priests, pharisees, and Sadducees. These poor guys. They had a problem: Jesus. And no matter what they tried it would not go away. They tried to discredit Jesus, saying he was just some guy from Nazareth. Didn't work; his teaching grew. They tried to explain away his miracles – “Oh the demons let him do such things.” That didn't work either; his fame grew. They tried to trick him. That just made it worse because he left them looking like fools each time.

So they plotted, they conspired, and they somehow, even though he was innocent, got him killed. “Finally! The Jesus problem is finally solved!” I imagine they had quite a happy Passover, having killed that “troublemaker and blasphemer.” Now they could go back to how it was, with them in power, with them in authority.

But nope.

Not long, not long at all, after their celebration, well, Jesus' followers start celebrating. I can imagine the Chief leaders' thoughts. "Why are they celebrating? Didn't we just kill their leader?" Then they hear the report, "They are saying Jesus is alive again!" I imagine, at first, they scoffed. "The fools! Bring the body out and shame them and him even more!" But then they get that bad news, "Wait, what do you mean there is no body? Uh oh." Yeah, this problem is not going away soon.

Poor guys.

Now, I'm obviously being sarcastic, sympathizing with the chief priests who murdered an innocent man. Their wickedness is on full display. How many times did they see Jesus heal and help others? How many times did they hear him teach and give testimony to who he was and how the prophets pointed to him? They even heard the report from the guards of the tomb about the bright light and the voice! But they still hardened their hearts, refused to believe, and paid off the guards to keep their mouth shut, and just say the disciples stole the body.

The Sadducees were especially "sad, you see" (heh), because they taught that there was no resurrection of the dead. So no wonder they are in a foul mood in verses 1-3: And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, 2 greatly annoyed because they were

teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. 3 And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening.

As if those “Jesus folk” weren’t bad enough. Now they are teaching people to believe in the “resurrection nonsense.” And notice the disciples weren’t *just* teaching that Jesus rose from the dead, notice that wording: “teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.” Did you catch that. The apostles are teaching that because Jesus rose (and he did) others will rise too.

Pretty annoying for the Sadducees, but pretty hopeful for us, no?

The reading goes on and those names Annas and Caiaphas, familiar from the Maundy Thursday and Good Friday readings, show up. These are two more who thought they had solved their “Jesus problem,” but are now stuck dealing with it again. They are interrogating Jesus’ disciples and hearing the name of Jesus being praised and blessed once more. They are having to decipher how the miracles of the apostles have come about and trying to make up ways to discredit them. And to top off their bad day and their continuing problem of Jesus, they are having the name thrown at them in accusation, “You killed Jesus, God raised Him, whose side are you on?” Poor guys.

But, again, in all seriousness, we have problems that sure don't seem to be going away soon. Jesus was dead for a weekend, I wonder what the widow of 30 years thinks about that. We have chronic pain, depression that doesn't just "go away," I have a heart condition that doesn't just "get fixed." What about regret and grief, some embarrassing mistake or shameful act in the past... you cannot fix that, you cannot go back and change it, you will always carry that. The teenager struggles because they will never look how they want, the man will never be as tall as he would like. The heartache we experience due to broken relationships doesn't seem to end. The cancer goes away but then it comes back, can you ever find peace with that stuff? And of course, death is a problem, ya? And it sure seems pretty permanent.

Yeah, it turns out, we all have our problems that look like they won't be going away soon.

But take heart. Because whatever problem you have, it won't last as long as the Sadducee's problem, I can assure you of that. Jesus lives and he will never die, and he is eternal. Romans 6:9 – "We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him." And so in an ironic but painfully obvious truth, we see that the "problem of Jesus" that the Sadducees and chief leaders had, isn't a problem at all. Not for those who confess his name; not for those baptized in his name; not for those united to him in faith.

No, Jesus is not a problem, we know that Jesus is the living embodiment of eternal good news. The Good Shepherd has laid his life down for you, it happened in history, that isn't changing. So we can know his love is there, always. The Good Shepherd is risen again, he had the authority to take it up again. And if he has the authority to do that, to conquer death, you better believe he has the authority to wipe out your problems.

Or do you have a problem that will challenge his authority? Strife, pride, discord, sickness, pain, cancer, sin, death? Please, those are little things to the Lord. None of those problems can overcome him, they cannot take us away from him, and trust me, they will not outlast him. Ask the Sadducees how persistent Jesus is! He is persistent and more so. He was, he is, and is to come. On the last day the final enemy, death, will be destroyed for good and he will raise his people up.

And on that day are we going to be bitter about those years of loneliness, or sickness, or pain, or grieving? Will we still be struggling with guilt for our stupid sins? No. Now, don't get me wrong, I and the scriptures, are not saying those things are good, or easy, or fun. Not at all. They are problems. But we know that because if they were something we could solve ourselves, Jesus didn't need to come. No, they are problems, and they are hard, so the Lord came to do what we could not. But because he has done that we can be of good courage! We have hope! Because he has promised we will be like him and with him. Which means

one day we will be healed, and whole, washed clean and forgiven, and the Shepherd will lead us in goodness. Folks, if Jesus is a problem, that's a good problem to have, and trust me, he, and you his people, don't go away. Thanks be to God.

Amen.