

## 2025 Acts 5

We read in our Acts 5 reading about the early days of the Church in Jerusalem following Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension. If we were to sum up the activity of the Church in Jerusalem in those days, one word that comes to my mind is: unstoppable!

The apostles could trip over something and have it work out. Even the shadows are doing work!

You have to feel a little bad for the Chief Priests, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees, they thought they had finally stopped this Jesus guy. They got him killed, they posted guards so the body wouldn't get stolen and the "second scandal be worse than the first." But... it's not working out for them at all.

The Church is Unstoppable. Not by death, for Jesus has undone it. And not by, as we see in our reading today, prison. The prison doors slam shut... only to swing back open again.

And the Angel of the Lord says, "Go to the temple!" Take this right back into their faces.

Unstoppable. Jesus, Risen again, has, as we see in our Gospel lesson, given them a task, he has sent them, to go exercise Law and Gospel, binding and forgiving sins – which, by the way is one of the reasons I, a sinner, stand here and give the absolution, it's because he said "you forgive the sins," so Pastors throughout time have been called out from among the Church to use these Keys – as they are called - not that we own them, but have been Properly Called to use them, and we say, "I forgive you." Because God wants you to know His forgiveness from the Cross is personally applied to you, not in some generic way, but by someone who is looking right at you.

I digress – He has sent them to do this and to be his eyewitnesses of His Resurrection. And not only has he sent them, he has equipped them for that task by giving them the Holy Spirit. In

Matthew's Gospel we remember he also sends them with a promise, "Lo, I am with you always to the very end of the age."

But then Jesus "Leaves." He ascends. Is he realllly still with them? Is the Spirit reaaallllly still with them? The tongues of fire from Pentecost go away, the sound of the wind goes away, the feelings go away... how do they know God will keep his post resurrection promises? 1. Because they know he kept his Pre-Resurrection promises. And 2. Because God confirms it with signs.

These unstoppable signs. The healings, the dominance over the forces of darkness, these all go to show that Jesus is faithful and has sent them and equipped them and will be with them.

Must be nice for them, right?

That's what the jaded pastor in me, thinks. We've seen countless programs go by the wayside.

We see, nationally, the pews shrinking. We say "I could use an unstoppable streak right now!"

"How about some unstoppable-ness with this Community, our people, the Auction, and Ministry Expansion!?" Seems like so much work, so much stress! And here the apostles are falling into success no matter what they do! And it isn't just this selfish pastor, what about the Church around the world? Persecution is on the rise. The Church is split by false teaching and it's leadership in every denomination is all sinners. Our shadows aren't doing anything it seems but maybe getting wider.

And in the real low-points of ministry... let me tell you - Forget "unstoppable," we seem so often to be barely able to keep any momentum moving! Isn't ministry supposed to be about the people and God's gifts? About baptisms and conversions, and the joy of the Lord and forgiveness? Why does it seem so much about bills, budgets, meetings, red tape, economics, enrollment, demographics. It's such a mass... keep moving. Churn, churn, churn, got to keep moving! Push!

It's exhausting, isn't it?

Lets go back to acts 5. We gloss over their prison stay because it ends so quickly, but maybe we should give this more thought. Do any of us want to go to prison and be detained even a few hours for being a Christian? Not really. Furthermore, when you look at the rest of Peter's life and ministry did he ever have any other hardship that maybe he didn't get out of so quickly? In Acts 15 we read of the Jerusalem council where there is division in the Church and the leaders must meet to set it straight. He knows of division. And, of course, we know of Peter's imprisonment and death. The prison bars didn't bounce back open that time. Why didn't God send an angel to spring him loose that time? Did he stop loving Peter? Did he not care? Or, did the Church become "stoppable" all the sudden and, "oh no, maybe God is too weak to save after ascension, so he can't save Peter or us anymore!"

Read that Revelation text of the ascended Lord and tell me he is too weak to save. You can't do it. Read that Revelation text and tell me the ascended Lord has lost interest in his Church. You can't do it. He holds them, the stars and lampstands which symbolize the Churches and their angels, in his hands. Nail scarred hands. We simply cannot say in the hardship of ministry or life that God has stopped caring for his people, nor can we say he isn't strong to save.

So maybe this Acts reading teaches us that there will be opposition to the Church, and some if it will be really hard. But it still will never be able to stop the Risen Lord. These miracles in Jerusalem then serve to show us, that any Christian, any time, around the world, any who belong to Jesus, no matter what hardship they face, they belong to One who is able to save, able to heal, even if that salvation and healing come in the fulness of His Kingdom. And we say that like it's a lesser thing. "Oh, Leroy didn't get the healing we all prayed for, he JUST will have to settle for the healing in the kingdom." What? As if that is second rate! Full, perfect, made-new healing!

You want to talk about unstoppable – how about God’s people on that day! So when Peter doesn’t get set free from prison and is executed – God still saves him! And brings him to the new, truly unstoppable day. Will he not do the same for you, his child?

Acts 5 then can’t be a promise that nothing hard or difficult will happen. Nor can it be some glory days that if we “really shaped up” we would recapture.

Acts 5 is given to us, and is God showing his whole Church, that no matter what hard things come – the victory is sure because the Church’s One leader, the Risen and Ascended King of all Creation is unstoppable. Un-endable. All enduring. Alpha and Omega. Gk Chesterton writes, reflecting on persecution and the stamping out of Christianity in this land or that for a time, he writes: “Christianity has died many times and risen again; for it had a God who knew the way out of the grave.” Unstoppable.

To belong to him then, when things get hard... and, by the way, lets not pretend that disowning Jesus, since he “doesn’t seem to be helping us much,” is that going to make life easier?

Renounce Jesus and what... you don’t get sick ever or die? No, when things get hard, those in Christ can be confident that God, who is unstoppable, will carry you along with him, sweeping you into and up with his eternal victory and eternal life.

That’s what the Angel charges the apostles to be about right? To be about “speak[ing] to the people all the words of this Life.” He has given us the words of life! Eternal life! That Good News of a Savior who overcomes the grave. The unstoppable Savior.

So when it seems so hard. When the congregations are closing, when the budgets seem insurmountable, when the divisions seem irreconcilable. When the healing seems impossible and the darkness all-encompassing... Remember this Word of Life that has come to you. Jesus is

alive. Jesus is yours. In Word, in Water, in Bread and Wine. You are, because of him, unstoppable. As a Church or congregation, We can lose the resources, we still have the Words of Life. As people, our hearts can stop beating, but not forever. Jesus' heart stopped beating, but not forever.

He is alive. He is strong. He holds the Church, which means he holds you, in his hands. Rest in His Powerful, unstoppable, Word of Life.