

# "Being With Jesus"

Acts 4:13-22

October 2, 2011

16<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost – LWML Sunday

Today is LWML Sunday. The theme is “Being With Jesus – Living on the Edge”. One pastor, when he heard that this was the theme, imagined for a second that the LWML President of his congregation would be bungee jumping off a mile-high bridge or something. “Living on the edge” means a dangerous or unusual life and bungee jumping like that would certainly qualify.

But that’s not what “living on the edge” refers to. “Being with Jesus” is “living on the edge.” Really? Is it dangerous or different to live as a follower of Jesus Christ? It didn’t used to be that way. In the not too distant past, Christianity was culturally acceptable. It was easy to be a Christian since most everyone claimed to be one. Everyone went to church. There were no conflicting activities on Sundays. In fact, in some places, stores and other businesses were closed on Sundays by law. It was easy to speak of your faith because it was shared by many. Even if some people didn’t share that faith, they weren’t offended by it either.

Today, that seems like so long ago. Following Jesus Christ today is truly “living on the edge.” It’s not just that Christianity is no longer embraced by the culture. It’s not just that many people don’t go to church any more or claim to be Christian. It’s not just that there are ball games and other activities routinely scheduled on Sunday mornings. Living as a Christian can bring a hostile, even dangerous reaction.

Erica Corder, a valedictorian in Monument, Colorado, was told she couldn’t speak about Jesus in graduation speech. When she did, she was told she wouldn’t get her diploma until she apologized for having said: “If you don’t already know (Jesus Christ) personally, I encourage you to find out more about the sacrifice He made.”

A California church made a short video to play in local movie theaters in order to advertise their Easter services. Even though they had a signed contract to show this ad on theater screens, the

movie houses rejected their video. It was deemed to be too controversial for mentioning the name Jesus Christ. They found it to be ironic that movies which take the Lord's name in vain are not too controversial, but a movie which honors the Lord's name is.

52 people were killed in one event in Baghdad in October 2010. This may not seem unusual in a country that is often a war zone and a haven for terrorists. But these people were Christians who were killed simply for going to church. That is the ultimate edge to live on – the edge between life and death – for being a Christian.

Maybe you hear stories like that and think that you couldn't do what your brothers and sisters in Christ did in that situation. You may not feel that you are good enough or strong enough to endure. Perhaps, more likely, you choose not to follow their example, even when the edge you live on is not as sharp. You CAN avoid the hostile, even dangerous reactions, which being a Christian brings. All you have to do is deny Jesus which we all do in some form or other.

We may not deny Jesus by what we say or what we do, but there are many other ways to deny Him. You can deny Jesus by making excuses, like Moses did, as to why you cannot confess Him in your God-given vocations. You can deny Jesus by what you do NOT say or do. When given the opportunity to speak up for Christ or to take action for the cause of the Gospel and you say nothing or do nothing, you are denying Him just the same. Maybe you are afraid because of the abuse you have received when you did speak up for the Gospel. Maybe you are afraid because of the rejection you will get when you live according to the will of God.

Vince Lombardi, famous coach of the Green Bay Packers said, "Fatigue makes cowards of us all." He meant when you get tired, you are afraid to play hard. In the same way, we might say, "Sin makes cowards of us all." Because of our sinful nature and because of the sin we do in denying Christ, we simply become tired of trying. We become comfortable in our denial of Christ. Yet Jesus says in our Gospel reading, "the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God." Sin and the denial of Christ brings denial by Christ of us.

Peter and John seem so different than the scenario I just described. They truly lived “on the edge.” Yet they seemed so smooth and so unafraid. Prior to our text, they had the faith to heal a man lame from birth in the name of Jesus Christ. After that miraculous act, they strongly preached the Word of God. In no uncertain terms, they condemned their listeners for rejecting Jesus Christ. There was no fear of what such blunt proclamation of the Law would bring. In no uncertain terms, they then proclaimed Jesus Christ as the source, not only of the physical healing of this lame man, but of spiritual healing through the forgiveness of sins.

For this they were arrested by the religious leaders of the day and thrown into jail. They, calmly and without fear, accepted this. When they were brought before these leaders, Peter condemned their sin and preached the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ for them, as well.

What got into these guys? What makes them so different? Why can they so boldly proclaim Christ in word and deed? What is so different about them compared with us? The answer is: absolutely nothing.

Our text says that, when the religious leaders “saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished.” Peter and John were common ordinary people, just like you and me. They were not educated. They had not been trained by rabbis in the Torah, the Jewish Scripture. No wonder that these upper class, well-educated leaders were astonished!

The only thing that was different? “They recognized that they had been with Jesus.” This is the key. These were sinful human beings. Peter had denied Jesus three times. John was a sinner as well. There was nothing in them to enable them to speak and live for Jesus. There was everything in Jesus to enable them to speak and live for Him.

With Jesus, there was forgiveness. He had suffered and died on the cross to forgive any and every sin, no matter how serious and no matter how often committed. Peter was forgiven for his

denial. John was forgiven for his sin, as well. The sin which made them cowards had been removed which also removed their cowardice.

With Jesus, there was also the Holy Spirit. The Spirit had been poured out on them on Pentecost. The Scripture says that Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit when He spoke boldly to the religious leaders. It was the Holy Spirit who inspired them to speak. It was the Holy Spirit who empowered them to speak.

There is nothing different for us. According to the way the world measures fame, we are very ordinary people. According to the way the world measures intelligence and education, we are probably not all that educated. There is nothing in us which would make us able to speak of Christ or live for Christ. But there is everything in the one whom we've been with by faith – Jesus Christ – which allows us to do that.

With Jesus, there is forgiveness for us. The forgiveness which Jesus earned on the cross for Peter and John for all of their sins is the same forgiveness He earned on the cross for all of your sins. For all the times you have denied the Gospel by what you have said or not said, His forgiveness covers you. For all the times you have denied the Gospel by what you have done or failed to do, His forgiveness covers you. The sin which makes us cowards has been removed. There is, therefore, no reason to be afraid.

With Jesus, there is the Holy Spirit for us. In your baptism, the same Holy Spirit who inspired and empowered Peter and John took up residence in you. His power and His inspiration are there for you. The words you need will be given you by the Holy Spirit as you witness to Jesus Christ and live for Jesus Christ.

The answer to how you “live on the edge” – that is, how to live the dangerous life of a Christian in a world hostile to Christianity this days – is to “be with Jesus”. This is not just for LWML ladies. It is for everyone. This is not just for a special day of celebration, but every day.

Be with Jesus. He, whom the Bible calls “the Word”, is present in His Word to speak the condemnation of the Law and the encouragement of the Gospel to us. Be with Jesus. He is present in the worship of His Church. He has promised, “For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.” (Matthew 18:20) Here He gives us His gifts – forgiveness, life, and salvation – Word and Sacrament. Be with Jesus. He is especially present in the bread and wine of Holy Communion where He gives us His body which was offered on the cross and His blood which was shed on the cross for us to eat and drink, sealing and guaranteeing the forgiveness of sins for us.

Be with Jesus and you will live on the edge. You will face difficult, discouraging, and even dangerous situations. It won't be easy. Yet His comfort will encourage you. His power will support you. And there will be nothing this sinful world can throw at you for faithfully following Christ which you will not be able to bear.

The women of the Lutheran Women's Missionary League are examples to be honored and followed, not because they are any less sinners or any more pious than the rest of us, but because of their emphasis on the Word of God – reading it, studying it, hearing it, sharing it, and proclaiming it. For they know what all of us need to remember. When you “live on the edge” in our non-Christian culture today – the edge between good and evil, belief and unbelief, acceptance and rejection, life and death – “being with Jesus” is the only way to go. Amen.