

“Sharing What We Have Seen and Heard”

Acts 4: 17-20

February 6, 2011 5th Sunday After the Epiphany (Lutheran Hour Ministries Sunday)

75 years ago, Dr. Walter A. Maier went on *The Lutheran Hour* radio broadcast and speaking for Lutheranism and all of faithful Christianity said this:

“...we acknowledge as our own the apostle's determination, “Not to know anything ... save Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”I offer you, in the name of the Triune God, not the Christ of present-day compromise and concession, not the Christ of twentieth-century indifference and indecision, not the Christ of modern doubt and denial, who has been exalted in His humanity, only to be robbed of His deity, but the Christ of the cross. With my hand on the Bible I dedicate this radio mission to the preaching of that cross, the cruel gibbet on which the Savior died the blackest death of all history. That crucified Christ, Son of God, yet Son of Man, the all-sufficient Savior and Him alone, we offer with the pledge, “Nothing Save Jesus Christ and Him Crucified in every message, every prayer, every hymn broadcast over this Gospel network.”

With that pledge, *The Lutheran Hour* was joined with this pulpit, with every parish, with every prophet and apostle who has believed and proclaimed God's Word is truth; with every soul which has courageously confessed Jesus Christ alone is the Savior of the world, and His Name is the only Name “given among men by which we must be saved.” This is God's truth and it is a truth which Satan, the “The Father of Lies”ⁱ, does not wish you, or anyone in this dark and damned world to know or acknowledge.

The ways of God are not what this world wants to hear. Last year in California, at the Los Angeles Community College, a professor called a student a “fascist BLEEP”, and threatened to expel him for making a speech which defended Christian marriage.ⁱⁱ At Georgia's Augusta State University student Jennifer Keaton was told she would be expelled from pursuing her counseling degree program “unless she altered her "central religious beliefs on human nature and conduct."r.ⁱⁱⁱ “Christians be silent” is the order which is being heard again and again in America's institutions of higher education.

The salvation of God is not what this world wants to hear. “The Father of Lies” does not want

people to know Jesus Christ as their Savior from the condemnation which awaits those who transgress God's ways. In his unholy crusade he has enlisted extremists from other religions. Go to Baghdad and ask the few Christians who survived the Sunday evening attack last October on Our Lady of Salvation Catholic Church. Let them tell you how the priest was ordered to lie down and then was murdered by members of a Muslim extremist group. Let them tell how gunmen shot at the crucifix, how they murdered more than 50 of our brothers and sisters as they prepared to worship. Understand, this was not an isolated incident. Again and again it is happening as religious terrorists demand, "Christians be silent."^{iv}

In truth, it would be easier to be silent. It would be politically correct to be silent. It might make us more popular if we were to be silent or preached a message without sin or repentance, without the Savior, or the salvation He has won. It would be easier to preach a social Gospel, a name-it-claim-it brand of religion. But we can't do that. The faithful followers of the Lord can never do that. Turn to Scripture and see Peter and John who were arrested and arraigned by the same Sanhedrin which had orchestrated the crucifixion of the Christ. When these apostles were told to stay silent in regard to the Savior who died for the salvation of all, with deliberation and dedication they declared: "We cannot help but speak about what we have heard and seen." These special servants of the Savior knew preaching Christ must take priority over silence or political correctness.

Look in Scripture and see the Apostle Paul. He endured pain, problems and persecution as he went about sharing the Savior's story of salvation. Even though both Jew and Greek found the message of the cross to be foolishness and demanded the apostle be silent, Paul decided he had to ignore their order and proudly proclaim: "... when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Cor. 9:16) Paul, like the other apostles, suffered terrible tortures and eventual martyrdom. Even so, history records no instance, no

moment when these servants embraced silence over a powerful proclamation of the Cross and empty tomb. On the contrary, as one they said, “We must obey God rather than men! We are witnesses of these things.” (Acts 5:32)

“The Father of Lies” does not want you to share these things with a world dying in sin, but the truth of God, the truth we have seen and heard, remains real and we must share it. God’s Word still says the world needs the Savior; the world is constant in requiring the redemption won by the Christ on the cross through His excruciating suffering and sacrificial death. We are blessed for we know that Savior. We have received the benefits of that redemption – forgiveness of sins, reconciliation to God, and life perfect and eternal in heaven. By the Holy Spirit’s power may all who hear this message be brought in humility and confession to the Son of God Who, almost 2,000 years ago was crucified, Who was buried in the borrowed tomb of Joseph of Arimathea and Who, on the third day after, rose in victory from the dead.

That, too is a truth the “Father of Lies” does not want the world to hear. On the first Resurrection Sunday, “The Father of Lies” told the world that the disciples had snuck into the tomb and stole away Jesus’ body. Did the disciples do that? Did they move the Savior’s corpse and hide it in another place? They did not. They freely admit in the Gospel narratives that they were afraid to come out of hiding. The disciples confess they did not have the courage to contend against the grave’s guard nor did they have the nerve to break the seal that was on the tomb.

In the centuries since the first Resurrection celebration, the devil has added other lies to that first. 2,000 years after Jesus emerged in victory from the grave, the devil says a weak and wounded Jesus revived in the dark, damp tomb and lived to found the French Monarchy (ala *The Da Vinci Code*). Well, did He revive? He did not. The women were the first to go to the tomb; but they did not go so they could be first to welcome back a revived and restored Jesus. Those women went to Jesus’

grave for the express purpose of embalming a body which they knew was dead.

The truth which we have seen and heard, the truth which has turned the world upside down, the truth which obtains our salvation is this: Jesus was crucified, He died and was buried. But the truth also is, on the third day He rose again. The disciples did not steal Jesus' body and they did not spend the rest of their lives promoting and perpetuating a lie. There have been many grand hoaxes in the annals of history, but nobody would die, as the disciples died, defending such a fraud. Who would be willing to be crucified or have the skin stripped from his body to uphold an untruth? The martyrdom of the disciples tells us: the once-dead Christ is very much alive.

Oh, how the "The Father of Lies" hates to hear those words ring from the lips of those disciples who believe Jesus is their Savior for this message – and this message alone – is able to free us from the devil who, the Scripture says, controls us with the fear of death. If Christ lives after dying, we, too, will live after dying. If we live after dying, then there is no reason to fear death.

Back in the 1800's, the atheist Robert G. Ingersoll gave a lot of speeches against Christ and the Bible, One time, he took out his watch and said, "I'll give God a chance to prove that He exists. I challenge Him to strike me dead within 5 minutes!" First there was silence. Then people became uneasy. Some people left the lecture hall because of the anxiety level. And one woman fainted. At the end of the allotted time, the atheist said, "You see! There is no God! I am still very much alive!" And then the Christian lady stood up and said, "You didn't prove that there is no God. You just proved that God isn't taking orders from atheists tonight."

That unbeliever represents millions of individuals for whom Jesus has died and stayed dead. They have listened to "The Father of Lies". They don't think they need the Savior. They may have believed at one time, perhaps when they were young. Back then, maybe long ago, they counted on Jesus. They said their prayers. They talked in Sunday School about salvation. But then, the "The

Father of Lies” made his move. Maybe he told them they were too old for that religion stuff, or maybe he said they were too sophisticated. Or maybe they became lonely, or hurt, or bitter, or they just forgot. But somewhere, somehow Jesus died for them and He stayed dead. They would like to pray. But they can't. They would almost like to have Someone in Whom they could believe, but they don't. Almost is a sad word when it comes to forgiveness, salvation and eternal life.

For the folks who have forgotten and those who never knew; for the ones who follow other gods and those who refuse to acknowledge any god is why Lutheran Hour Ministries continues to proclaim what we have seen and heard. Even as the pulpit of Peace Lutheran Church shares the Savior's story of salvation with folks in Great Falls, so The Lutheran Hour and the other programs of Lutheran Hour Ministries tries to bring Christ to the Nations. They, like we, remain dedicated to proclaiming what we have seen and heard. They, like we, remain faithful to preaching Christ crucified and risen in everything they do. They, like we, remain committed to telling this sin-saddened world that Jesus has not almost succeeded in saving us; He is not an almost Savior, an almost Redeemer, an almost Conqueror. He is the One to whom we can go, for He is the One Who has eternal life. This is the Christ Whom we have seen and heard. His is the story that we share. May God grant His Spirit's blessing upon us as He breaks Satan's silence as we share what we have seen and heard. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

ⁱ John 8: 44

ⁱⁱ <http://www.examiner.com/church-state-in-los-angeles/judge-rules-favor-of-lacc-student-defending-traditional-marriage>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2010/07/27/georgia-university-tells-student-lose-religion-lawsuit-claims/>

^{iv} <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-11463544>