

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Sunday after Easter
April 8, 2018
Sermon by Pastor Daniel Pautz
Surprise
—Acts 3:12-20

I will start by asking some questions of those who moved here as adults from different states or nations. Think back when you were in 5th or 6th grade. Would you have been surprised to know that someday you would be living in Arizona? Would you have been surprised to know you would be living in the kind of home in which you are now living? And those of you who are married – would you be surprised to have known whom you would marry? And now for all of you, especially sports fans – would you have been surprised to find out that someday the Chicago Cubs would win a World Series? I think all of us would be surprised if God told you years ago of the many blessings He would give you and also the difficulties you would face in life ranging from sicknesses to family challenges to unexpected deaths. Then there are the pleasant surprises such as surprise birthday party and surprise gifts.

It was probably in late May or early June that many church people were surprised. It happened in the temple area in Jerusalem about two or three months after that first Easter. A man was there who was crippled from birth. It was not that he walked with a bad limp. He could not walk at all and he had never walked. He had to be carried. Every day he was carried to the temple area and he had been reduced to begging. Most people who came to the temple had seen him and they knew that here was a person who had real needs. He did not work because he could not. It was about three o'clock in the afternoon when Peter and John had come to the temple, and the beggar asked them for money. Listen to what happened. (Acts 3:4-6) **“Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!” So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.”** My goodness, see what happened. (Acts 3:7-8) **Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.”** For the first time in his life he was walking and jumping like a deer. What a surprise!

But an even bigger surprise than that he was healed was who did the healing. Peter very clearly told the amazed crowd. “We did not do it but Jesus Christ of Nazareth is the one who did it.” That Jesus had healed a crippled man should not have been surprising. Had not Jesus miraculously healed many people throughout the area, lepers and the blind and the deaf? Had he not even healed crippled people before? Had he not even raised Lazarus from the dead, a miracle witnessed by many? Yet the healing of this crippled man was surprising because they thought that Jesus was dead. Peter did not tippy toe around them. He boldly said **You handed Jesus over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. But then Peter added, You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.**

Surprised that Jesus rose from the dead? It seemed that at first everyone was surprised. The women had

come to the tomb early Easter morning to anoint a dead body. They were surprised when told by an angel that "He has risen!" The disciples were surprised. On Easter evening the disciples were huddled in fear behind locked doors when Jesus appeared to them. And what can we say about Thomas who had doubted the resurrection? They too were surprised.

But they ought not to have been surprised. Peter told them that Christ's sufferings, death, and resurrection had been foretold by the Old Testament prophets. Jesus himself had said various times that he would be betrayed to the chief priests and condemned to death, handed over to the Gentiles and be mocked and whipped and crucified. And he always added these words that on the third day he would rise from the dead. He also had said that just as Jonah was inside that huge fish for three days and came out the third day, so he too would be in the earth and come out on the third day. Christ's resurrection should not have been a surprise to anyone. Surprise? No, not at all. The problem was that they had not believed God's Word.

Surprises in your life, some of which happened because you doubted God's Word:

- ◇ As you look back upon your life, are you surprised by the amount of worrying and fretting you have done? Was it because you had not trusted fully God's Word that he would take care of you?
- ◇ Are you surprised by problems and troubles that have come your way? Maybe you forgot that this earth is not heaven and also, as the Bible says, through many hardships we enter the kingdom of heaven.
- ◇ Are you surprised by the great amount of false teaching and deceitful doctrines in this world? It ought not to surprise you because Jesus warned us about this very thing.
- ◇ If we older adults had been told years ago that in your lifetime there would be same-sex marriages and that worldwide there are about 125,000 abortions per day and that our schools have to be protected with security fences because of evil people, would you have been surprised? Yes, but God has told us that the world is very evil.
- ◇ If you married unwisely, are you surprised if things did not work out?
- ◇ Are you surprised if you have been drinking too much or been on drugs that you got into trouble? You should not be surprised because the Bible says we Reap what we sow.

Surprised by some of the sins you committed? You thought you could never do something like that. A woman who became irked at her husband who continually put her down, cussed at her and used profanity said later that she was surprised by the profanity that in turn came out of her mouth. But we all need to remember that each of us is capable of committing unthinkable sins.

Does it surprise you that you are continually called upon to repent? It should not for we daily sin much.

But there are many pleasing and pleasant surprises:

- ◇ Surprised that God has forgiven all your sins? It ought not to be surprising for God loves to forgive.

Peter told the people to repent and turn to God and their sins would be wiped out. Jesus lived that perfect life for you and then also for you took the punishment of your sins.

- ◇ Surprised that God loves you? You ought not to be surprised because ‘loving’ is how God is. In his compassion he gave his one and only Son for you.
- ◇ Are you surprised that you have been able to endure great difficulties and even tragedies in life? Remember God always provides strength and never gives you more than what you can bear.
- ◇ Surprised that you always had enough to take care of yourself? You ought not be surprised because God has promised to take care of you.

It would seem that there is another big surprise in the sermon text. Who is the one that is speaking so bluntly and boldly and directly, accusing them of murder? Here are some of his words, **“You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead..... Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out.”** Why, it is the Apostle Peter saying these bold words – and that may seem surprising. Not too long ago despite the Lord’s warnings Peter had denied the Lord three times. He was afraid to admit that he was a follower of Jesus. In fact, in his third denial, he emphatically said that he did not even know this man Jesus and he cursed like a fisherman and swore that he was not connected with Jesus. And this is the man who so courageously spoke about Jesus and called upon them to repent of their sins?

Surprising? But not really.

- ◇ Peter’s sins were forgiven by Jesus.
- ◇ Peter was strengthened by Jesus.
- ◇ But a few days before this incident was Pentecost – the special coming of the Holy Spirit upon the followers of Jesus – the promise of Christ that when the Holy Spirit would give them clarity and power to witness his Word. We see the fulfillment of that immediately on Pentecost Sunday as Peter called out to them to repent and be baptized. 3000 were baptized.
- ◇ After this incident we hear that the number of Christians had grown to 5000. Shortly following this miraculous healing a great number of priests became Christians

It was 125 years ago that our little Wisconsin Lutheran Synod began mission work among the Apache Native Americans in Arizona. The pastors who came knew German better than English – of course, the Apaches knew neither language. Somehow or other as the pastors spoke about Jesus, there were those who became Christians. The oldest Lutheran Churches in Arizona of any kind are on the reservations, places such as San Carlos and Peridot and East Fork and Whiteriver and Cibecue. Today there are several Apache pastors who are among the pastors on the San Carlos and the White Mountain Reservations. Surprised? Yes and No. No because the Holy Spirit works wonders.

It would be equally as surprising that you and I are believers because it takes the same miracle of conversion by the Holy Spirit. By nature we are not believers, but we have been brought to faith.

Surprises in the future?

- ◇ Do not be surprised that you will be cared for in the future by God for he has promised to take care of you and make all things work together for your good.
- ◇ Some will be surprised that they will not be going to heaven. Unbelievers such as agnostics and atheists and all who do not trust in Jesus ought not be surprised that they end up in hell because the Lord has said that those who do not believe will be condemned.
- ◇ It should not come as a surprise that we will be in heaven because the Bible says that “God so love d the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. Likely, the biggest surprise will be how wonderful and joyful heaven is and how great it will be to be with Jesus.

Surprises? Yes, there will be some in life. But the main things will not come as a surprise – thanks be to Jesus. Whoever believes will not perish but have everlasting life.