

“No Accident” Acts 2:22-36

Finally we have stepped out of the Old Testament after more than a few weeks of traversing through it. It's like, as a child, your Mom and Dad finally saying only after an hour but to you feeling it's been a month, that's, "It's time to leave" after visiting those "older" relatives you saw only once a year on your summer holidays. Finally, we have stepped out of the "stale" Old Testament into the spring-like "freshness" of the New Testament. Away from exile and into the Promised Land... but not yet... for it seems like the cycle of sin and disobedience that always ended with exile has continued. From the moment that Adam and Eve tasted that first apple, God has been working on a plan of redemption ever since. For generations, even millennia, it seemed like everything God tried failed, so maybe just maybe, it was time for God to bring out his "backup plan," you know, "Plan B". If, as Allyson reminded us last week, the covenant was broken, the sacrificial system irreparable and the Kingdom too distant then it would be far better for God to go to the whiteboard and draw up something else, something completely different. So then here we are again in the Book of Acts, a letter written to "insiders," not outsiders. Although Allyson and I have been stressing to you over a number of weeks now that the Book of Acts is a Book about "disciples making disciples" it is not necessarily a letter written to those not yet disciples but penned to disciples – those "struggling to retain their boldness, faith, confidence". (Source: Will Willimon) It's a letter to those who have not arrived but "journeying" as Allyson also reminded us last Sunday. It is story of the church being empowered to complete God's original "Plan A". By the time Acts 2:22 is read the Spirit of God that was present since the very beginning, "moving over creation" (Gen 1:20) but who we like to think of as showing up for the first time in the Upper Room with the tongues of fire (Acts 2:1ff) or the coming of the Messiah with his first breath outside his mother's womb (Matt 1:18) was in fact also present at creation and was the One to come even before Adam and Eve tasted that apple, has come (John 1:1) Jesus was God's Plan A, all along. Jesus alone was and still is the only way to restore the broken relationship humanity has with God and this was central to Peter's message that day to those who had gathered.

What Jesus did then, "signs and miracles" (2:22-23) "attested" that He was in fact from God and did the work of God, as Peter outlines. All you need to do is re-read the Old Testament and see for yourselves the countless references, images, prophecies that speak of Jesus' coming but even more, detailed notes of exactly how the story would play itself out. The prophet Isaiah, for example, some 700 years before Christ arrival wrote of the coming Messiah saying, "2 He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,

nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. 3 He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. 4 Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. 6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. (Isaiah 53:2-7) Although un-named, this is the story of Jesus life and death, is it not? This is the death that would once and for all restore humanity back to God, mend the relationship salvage the covenant, and bring near the Kingdom that seemed too distant. But a dead Messiah is just that – dead: Noble, but still dead. And if our Messiah is dead than our sins are also still dead. For God’s Plan A to truly work death cannot have the final word. For us to live forever our Messiah must live forever. And this is why Peter moves from Jesus’ life and ministry to Jesus’ resurrection (2:24-32) as proof that Jesus coming was no accident.

There is no need to look up the reference for the importance of a “living” Messiah in our Old Testament because Peter reads chapter and verse to his audience. Psalm 16 then becomes the prophesy and Jesus, well Jesus rising from the grave that we celebrate on Easter Sunday and remember in the meal set before us this morning, becomes the proof. As great as King David was, especially in the hearts and minds of Peter’s hearers, Peter reminds all those willing to listen that David died and was buried and his tomb that you can visit holds his body or what remains of it. Jesus, on the other hand also has a tomb and if you like you can go visit too. But there is striking difference between Jesus’ tomb and David’s tomb. There is no body - not even dust from Jesus’ body because Jesus is not dead but “resurrected.” “God raised Jesus’ up,” writes Peter (2:24) and those who saw Him (like Peter) are “his witnesses”. (2:24) But not only them but hundreds of others who saw this “resurrected Jesus”. You would think then that there would be countless historical writers of the period who deny Jesus’ resurrection but you would find very little, if anything, because of the proof that Jesus actually did what his followers believed. And if Jesus was raised to life then we too can be raised to new life. We too can live forever and forever begins now! It is the reason that Peter continues saying Jesus life and ministry and his resurrection was why Jesus was finally exalted. (Acts 2:33-36)

This exaltation, (sitting at the right hand of God – a place of power) (2:33) has made Jesus both “Lord and Messiah.” (2:36) Messiah as in Savior or the one who would restore God’s covenant

and Lord as in the One alone deserving of our total and absolute submission and all because this Jesus who was put to death on a cross. The cross of Christ therefore becomes central to the gospel story. Everything flows from the cross of Christ. Two simple beams became for the early church not just a symbol of the most horrific death the Romans could invent but two pieces that restored both our vertical relationship with God and our horizontal relationship with one another. It's the reason there are crosses in our churches and the reason a cross hangs at the front of our own sanctuary. But "What you may not know is that this cross (the one at the front of our church) was not supposed to be where it is now. It's lovely and many people (both familiar and new) have remarked over the years how much they like our simple 10 foot cross, made out of two old pieces of found wood. But the truth of the matter is that "this" cross is an accident. I mean, I found those two old pieces on church land in the ditch between us and our neighbor. They were two pieces from an old fence that once divided the two properties. When we were having our first Easter Sunrise service, even before the church was built, we took two pieces and made that cross. It seemed like a fitting reminder during the Easter Season. It remained standing for some time, during construction, close to the road but then moved so as not to be backed into by a truck or run over by the bobcat. To be honest I was planning on throwing that old cross away after the building was complete but someone told me not to discard of it. So it went from the ditch to the front property, to the storage room, to the foyer, and then to a prominent position at the front of our sanctuary – an accident. But the original cross - It was no accident at least that's what Luke would tell you.

According to Luke the cross was no accident. What God organized and Jesus accomplished through his ministry, his resurrection and exaltation was God's plan all along just as you are. Some parents tell their children how they were "unplanned," an accident, as it were. But you are not. No one is unplanned. It is no accident that you are here, even here this morning. And it is no accident that this meal is before you - a meal to remind you of Jesus life and ministry, his death, his resurrection and exaltation: Messiah and Lord. So come to this table, not because you must but because you may, not because you are strong, but because you are weak. Come, not because any goodness of your own gives you a right to come, but because you need mercy and help. Come, because you love the Lord a little and would like to love him more. Come, because he loved you and gave himself for you. Come and meet the risen Christ, for we are his Body.