

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

[The Economy of Salvation]

Alleluia! He is risen! *He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!*

Without any merit or worthiness in us,

Jesus Christ died **our Death** and has overcome Death.

He has freely given us **His Life**.

He paid the price for the whole world— no purchase necessary for us.

He expects nothing in return— you owe no debt.

His promise is good forever— no exchanges possible, nor qualifications attached.

His ‘economy of salvation’ doesn’t work like some worldly economy.

And, God be praised, what that means for our lives today!

[The Economy of New Life]

In today’s reading from Acts, we read about how some of the first followers of Christ Radically organized their lives in a pattern after Him.

And why wouldn’t they?

If Christ who once was dead is now *living* again (and He is!)
then He is the authority on *living*!

These Christians’ radical lives upset the established worldly order.

Hear again from Acts chapter 4 just how radically they lived:

*Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their **witness** to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.*

(Acts 4:32-35)

Now what does this situation sound like to our modern ears?

It sounds a little like Socialism, if not outright Communism!

The first Christians sound like they painted the minibus
and drove off to a hippie commune!

[Mistaken earthly views]

And, in fact, that is precisely what some have concluded.

If you consult a biblical commentary about this text,
—and I consulted *several* for this sermon—

it will likely arrive at one of two views, with little nuance in between.

On one hand, some cite this text as proof
that Jesus endorsed *radical* earthly economic change.

After all, 16 of His 38 parables were about money:

The Parable of the *Coins*

The Parable of the *Rich Fool*

The Parable of the Unforgiving *Debtor*

Even the Parable of the Good Samaritan features the titular character
paying handsomely for the injured man's recovery.

Plus, Jesus Himself flat out said, He came "*to the poor*" and "*the poor in spirit.*"

(Matt. 5:3, Luke 4:18, Luke 6:20)

They have a point that God is not indifferent to economic injustice.

And so, they conclude that "*if Jesus were alive today*"

He would wave a red flag of revolution for the suffering Proletariat,

Demanding *radical* change!

The problem with that is, of course, that Jesus *is* alive today!

The promise of Easter is fresh in our minds;

we *know* His victory was not for mere economic change.

At the other end of the spectrum,

scholars state that this passage is merely *de*-scriptive of how the Apostles lived,
not *pre*-scriptive for us today.

In other words, that this is simply an historical accounting to be glossed over.

Besides, some of them add,

the Apostles could not have foreseen the great wealth
that would come through the invisible hand of the free market.

They would not have been so *radically foolish* otherwise.

The problem with this, of course, is that Jesus Himself

—the All-Knowing God in the flesh—

instructed His Apostles.

No, the 'economy of New Life' is not about *worldly* economies.

To whittle this down to a distinction between "*De*-scriptive and *Pre*-scriptive?"

Too simplistic.

God's good **Law** is present here!

To whittle this down to a worldly position on worldly wealth?

Too simplistic.

God's good **Gospel** is present here!

[Witnesses in the text]

So what are we to make of this text?

Rather than impose a certain worldly economic theory on it, we must let the text speak.

Wedged between these verses about economic organization
is a beautiful statement,

the reason for the Apostles' actions,
and the reason we are here today:

*“And with great power the apostles were **giving their witness**
to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.”* (Acts 4:33)

Notice what the Apostles were doing?

Not writing manifestos on the merits of some worldly economic system.

(Certainly not squabbling about it on Social Media.)

They were “**giving their witness.**”

And what were they witnessing to?

“The resurrection of the Lord Jesus.”

Everything they did was to advance that message: to witness about Jesus.

The disciples saw a need in their community and filled it.

That was how they witnessed about Jesus' love for all people.

It was *radical* – or *radically foolish* depending on one's view of worldly economics.

But it was how they witnessed to their neighbors about Jesus.

[The result of witnessing]

The world sorely needs our witness.

In today's Gospel lesson, the surviving disciples locked themselves in an upper room,
afraid they'd be crucified next.

Then they witnessed Jesus appearing to them.

They were filled with joy!

All except Thomas, who wasn't with them.

*“Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails,
and place my finger into the mark of the nails,
and place my hand into his side,
I will never believe.”* The Doubter said.

(John 20:25)

You know what happened: Thomas became a witness.

“My Lord and my God!” he confessed.

(John 20:28)

And he never stopped witnessing.

He witnessed all the way to India, and perhaps even China.

He told people about Jesus.

Subsequently, the people stopped offering gifts to the local pagan priests,
instead offering gifts to each other.

It was a radical change.

The pagan priests found it bad for business.

About 70 AD, they had Thomas speared to death.

His witnessing led to his martyrdom.

[The Martyrs]

Now, that word “**witness**”... it comes from the Greek word *μαρτυριον*.

(*mar-ter-AY-ohn*)

That’s the same root of our English word “martyr.”

Because that’s what “martyr” means.

Simply “to witness.”

It’s a verb.

The apostles, like Thomas, were “martyr-ing” on their way to “martyrdom.”

We are called to be martyrs too.

You heard what Jesus said when He appeared to the disciples:

“*Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.*”

(*John 20:21*)

This is why you are here in this place,

where we equip *disciples* to make *disciples* for Jesus

witnesses to make *witnesses* for Jesus

martyrs to make *martyrs* for Jesus.

Patterned after Christ,

Our personal ‘economies’ are not based on improving life for ourselves,

but for our neighbor;

giving them, above all, the richest-possible gift they could ever receive:

forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

The world will often find us *Radical*. Or *radically foolish*.

Divisive, even. So divisive that you may be called to martyrdom.

But the Word of the Lord grows through the witness of the martyrs.

When the Portuguese arrived in India almost 1500 years after Thomas witnessed there, they expected to “Christianize” the people.

The people were already Christian.

To this day, millions of Christians in India trace their church all the way back to the **witness** of St. Thomas.

Brothers and sisters,

We do not require earthly wealth or economic clout to be witnesses of Jesus Christ.

We need only His Word.

And He has given it to us.

More than that, He has given us *His* life, *His* salvation and *His* peace.

“*Peace be with you,*” He said. “As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.”

The Father sent Him to conquer death. To *live*.

He is the authority on *living*.

He sends you to *live* too.

In Jesus’ name. Amen.

**Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous deeds among the people. Amen! (Psalm 96:3)**