

*Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: ... “Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.<sup>23</sup> This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.<sup>24</sup> But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.<sup>25</sup> David said about him:*

*“ ‘I saw the Lord always before me.*

*Because he is at my right hand,*

*I will not be shaken.*

<sup>26</sup> *Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;*

*my body also will live in hope,*

<sup>27</sup> *because you will not abandon me to the grave,*

*nor will you let your Holy One see decay.*

<sup>28</sup> *You have made known to me the paths of life;*

*you will fill me with joy in your presence.’*

<sup>29</sup> *“Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day.<sup>30</sup> But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne.<sup>31</sup> Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay.<sup>32</sup> God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. (Acts 2:14a, 22-32)*

### **God’s Plans Are Not What We Expect**

At the end of my first year in college, I joined the army. I had spent five years in our synod’s training system, going all the way back to my first year in high school, preparing to become a pastor. But when I walked off the campus that spring, I thought I was closing the door on ever becoming a pastor. Obviously, it didn’t work out that way. How did my plans change? I spent a year in California in a city where the WELS did not have a church. I wasn’t able to worship the way I wanted to. As I thought about it, I realized that one reason for that was the need for young men to prepare for the ministry. Who could’ve ever predicted that God would use the experience of being away from church to bring me here to Livonia? This morning, we haven’t come here to reflect on my life. We’ve come here to reflect on Jesus’ life. But in the word of God that we heard this morning, Peter makes the same observation about Jesus’ life that I just made about my own. Who would’ve guessed that God would do the things he did in the ways that he did them in the life of Christ? **God’s plans are not what we expect.**

#### **I.**

Peter was speaking on the day of Pentecost, just seven weeks after Jesus died. For three years, the people of Israel had hung on Jesus’ every word. Crowds had gathered everywhere he went. One of Jesus’ enemy, had said, **“Look how the whole world has gone after him!”** Then, after marching into Jerusalem in triumph, Jesus had died. That was still fresh in everybody’s mind. No doubt, many people were still wondering why. Peter explained: **God’s plans are not what we expect. He always planned for Jesus to die.**

Peter said, **“Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.”** People remembered those miracles, wonders and signs. They remembered that Jesus had twice fed thousands of people with one person’s lunch. They remembered that he had raised Lazarus from the dead four days after that man died. They remembered Jesus healing the sick and driving out demons and how much they had wanted to see him do those miracles. But not everyone had understood them. The question on everybody’s mind for three years had been, “Is Jesus the Christ? Is he the promised Savior?” The miracles were God’s answer. The people were supposed to see the miracles and then look at Jesus and see that behind the human face, behind the real human body that they could see and touch, God had hidden himself. The Son of God was the Christ. He was the Savior come to take their sins away. Peter reminded them of what they had seen and heard and he told them what it all meant.

Then Peter addressed their disappointment and confusion. Jesus had not lost. He had not failed in his mission as Christ. Dying did not mean his miracles were false. Peter said, **“This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.”** Jesus was handed over “by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge.” God always planned that Jesus would die. It wasn’t an accident. It wasn’t a failure or a defeat. It was exactly what he came here to do. That’s the part that defies human expectation. If you or I went to all the trouble that God went to for Jesus to be here – if you or I organized the history of the world, if we made kingdoms rise and fall, all so that one man could be born in one specific place at one specific time – the mission we would give that man would not be to die like a slave. It would not be to throw his life away. We would send him to change the world.

Well, God did send Jesus to change the world. But he had to lose to win. He had to suffer and die like a slave to triumph. He had to throw his life away when he could’ve escaped, when he could’ve defended himself, when he could’ve made it impossible for his enemies to touch him. He had to do all that because Jesus came to take our place. And that’s the most unexpected thing of all. What master dies in place of a slave? That’s what Jesus did for us. By dying, he won.

Peter said, “You put him to death by nailing him to the cross.” He said that they did that “with the help of wicked men.” Even though God wanted Jesus to die – even though that was God’s plan from the time that Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden – the people who killed him were still sinning. They weren’t thinking, “This is God’s command, we better obey it.” The Jewish leaders hated Jesus and they wanted him dead. Pontius Pilate was afraid. He knew Jesus was innocent but he cared more about what would happen to him if he refused to execute Jesus. These people were wicked and guilty, even though God used them to accomplish his set purpose. And the crowds of Jews who had welcomed Jesus on Palm Sunday had cried out for his blood on Good Friday. They were guilty, too. They had put him to death.

Now, does that mean that everyone there on the day that Peter spoke these words was there on Good Friday chanting, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”? No. Almost certainly, there were people in this crowd who were not there before. But every Jew sent Jesus to the cross because every Jew sinned. And every gentile is just as guilty of nailing Jesus to the cross because every one of us is a sinner. We all sin every day of our lives.

You know that what I’m saying is true. There are so many times when God calls us to act differently than we do, to have a different spirit than we have. Just this week, I was driving back from a meeting and I stopped to put gas in my car. A man walked up just when I finished and ask me to buy him some gas because he had run out. I was tired. The pump was already shut off. I wasn’t in the mood and I just shook my head and walked away. Now, was I required to buy him gas? No. But does God require that I show love and compassion to my fellow man, especially when they’re in need? Does God condemn the selfishness that comes out when we’re tired and we don’t want to be put out? Yes to both.

God commands us to have hearts that are full of love, love that will move us to actually live our faith. That means compassion for each other and for those who are in difficulty. That means dedication to the Lord and to hearing his word. That means a new and different life – in what we do with our time and what we think about and what’s important to us. The fact that we don’t always live like that is exactly what nailed Jesus to the cross. The fact that we can come here, year after year, and hear that Jesus died and rose for us and we can walk out and sin almost without thinking about it shows how hard our hearts are by nature. The hardness of our hearts nailed Jesus to the cross.

You and I and every human being who ever lived deserved what Jesus got. God should send all of us to hell. If he did, it would make perfect sense. We might not like it, but punishing sinners is the just thing to do. But God showed us mercy where we deserved punishment. God showed us forgiveness where we deserved his anger. God sent his own Son to die on that cross to pay for our hearts that still don’t take him seriously enough, that still love ourselves too much to bother with other people, that still deserve hell. Because God knew what we would be before he created the world, he always planned to send Jesus to take our place in death and hell. He always planned to wipe our guilt away.

## II.

Jesus’ death was not the end. We know that because we’ve heard the story so many times before. But Peter was talking to people who had seen Jesus die. They didn’t understand yet that he had risen. because nobody lives once they’re dead. **God’s plans are not what we expect. He always planned for Jesus to rise**

Peter said, **“But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.”** Why was it impossible for death to hold Jesus? Because Jesus was the Son of God. He was the creator of life. He could not stay physically dead. Jesus was also perfect. He never sinned once. Death is the wages of sin. Jesus had no sin so he had to rise. Jesus won the victory over death and hell. He paid the full price that we owe. He had to rise to show that we will rise.

So God freed him from death. And he always planned to do that. To prove that point, Peter quoted from a psalm that King David wrote a thousand years before Jesus was born. David said, **“... you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.”** God would not abandon Jesus to the grave. He would have to enter the grave, but he would not stay there. Jesus, God’s Holy One, would not see decay. His body didn’t stay dead long enough to rot. David foresaw someone dying and rising to live with God forever.

Now, one thing might be bothering you about this quote: David says “I” and “me” throughout all the verses Peter recites here. It sounds like he was talking about himself, right? Well, Peter answered that question. He pointed out that King David did die. And he stayed dead. He was buried and to this very day, King David’s body is in the tomb – at least what’s left of it. If we could find that tomb today, we’d be lucky if we found even bones from a body that has been dead for three thousand years. But David said, **“... you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.”** The “I” and the “me” in this passage is not David. David wrote down the words, but the person who was speaking was Jesus. A thousand years before it happened, Jesus showed his people that he would die and then rise.

That’s not a plan we could ever come up with. But it is the plan God devised. And it worked. Jesus rose and that means that all our sin is paid for. God no longer sees selfishness. He no longer sees all the ways we fail to live up to him. Jesus rose and every day it’s like yesterday’s never happened. And God works through that message of the gospel to change our lives. God says, “I love you. I sent my Son to die and rise for you. I forgive you.” In all that love, he reaches into our hearts and he makes us trust in him. And then he leads us to live for him. He creates in us the will and the desire to follow him and then he calls us to commit ourselves to do just that.

Everything God does in our lives, he does through the gospel. So he guides our lives so that we do hear it. God does amazing things. He comes to us in the waters of baptism and he washes our sins away. He comes to us in bread and wine and he gives us the body and blood that Jesus offered on the cross and he renews our faith and our commitment to him. He comes to us in the message we hear Sunday after Sunday and he draws us closer to him. He comes to us sinners when we feel worthless and he forgives us. He comes to us when our hearts are broken and he picks us up off the floor with message of his love. He comes to us when we don’t care and reminds us what really matters.

And he works through everything that we face in this life to drive us back to that gospel. Sometimes, he plans for us to follow Jesus in suffering and pain. God uses pain to burn away the impurities in our faith, to force us to trust only in him. Sometimes, he plans for us to face difficulties we never expected, to work with people we don’t like, to endure changes we hate, so that we wrestle with what is truly important in our lives and learn to put him first. Often, God’s plan for our lives makes no sense at all to us. We ask, over and over again, “Why? Why do I have to go through all of this?” God doesn’t answer except to say that his priority is to get us to heaven. All that he does is part of his design to take us there.

So while we walk the bumpy road through this life into the next one, we come back, again and again, to Jesus who died for us. To Jesus who rose for us. To God’s plan to take away our sins and give us eternal life. We come back to the word which tells us that plan and God works through that word to give us a faith that trusts what he is doing. Then in faith, we commit ourselves to following God again today. That is God’s plan. It makes no sense to the unbeliever. But to us who know the love and the power of God, it is the only plan that matters. Trust in Jesus. Amen.