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Easter II
April 12, 2026
Text: Acts 5:29 – 42
Title: Eavesdropping

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Things had been going pretty well for Joseph lately. That is Joseph Caiaphas, the high priest of Israel. For the longest time he had been worried about so many different things, but that seemed to be changing for him now. The current Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, was finally beginning to understand how things worked in this city, and who was really in charge of God's chosen people, no matter what Caesar said back in Rome. Joseph and the rest of the Council had made that pretty clear to him when he tried to release that would-be Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. He still remembered the sense of satisfaction that he had felt when Pilate had called for the basin of water and washed his hands of the whole thing. That entire situation had turned out just the way that they had intended for it to end, with Jesus hanging on a cross as a criminal.

Joseph always knew that was the inevitable result. They couldn't let the people continue to go after that Nazarene, or the Romans would eventually step in to put a stop to it. And if that had happened, a lot more blood would have been spilled than from just that one man. Caiaphas had clearly seen that result when he told the Sanhedrin that it was better for one man to die than for the whole nation to be destroyed.

Yes, things had gone pretty well through that entire incident, except for the temple curtain suddenly tearing in two for no apparent reason. In spite of that, Joseph was proud that they seemed to have thought of every detail right down to requesting a guard be posted at the tomb of the Nazarene. Things got complicated on Sunday morning when the guards had come to tell them that things had somehow gone wrong. They had a ridiculous story to tell about an

earthquake and an angel appearing on the stone and them being paralyzed by the sight of it and the most incredible part of all, the dead man walking out of the tomb. The guards also told them about the women and the man's disciples seeing everything, and Joseph knew that they had to counter their story somehow, so after conferring with the elders the decision was made to bribe the guards to spread the word that the disciples stole the body.

That seemed to take care of things for a while. Life returned to normal, and Caiaphas and the others went back to conducting their business around the temple. There were sacrifices to be made. The exchange rate of the Roman coins for the temple coins had to be reviewed, and new livestock had to be brought in so that people could purchase it for their personal sacrifices. Plans for the next festival had to be made so that things would go smoothly. All of these things progressed as they should, now that the trouble was over with. The guards were spreading the story about the stolen body, and the people seemed to be accepting it for the most part.

But then they started showing up in the temple courts. The Galileans who had followed Jesus of Nazareth were suddenly preaching about Him to the people, and they were doing it right in the middle of the temple precinct. It didn't seem to have much of an impact at first, but then Caiaphas and the others realized that each time they were there more people joined them in believing that Jesus was the Messiah. Not only did they believe that, but they were also starting to listen to the apostles teaching about how Joseph and the others were responsible for the Nazarene's execution. That was unacceptable. His blood could not be placed on their head. These men had to be stopped and their message silenced. As the high priest, Caiaphas knew that he had to think of something soon or they would have more trouble on their hands than they would have had if they had just left Jesus alone. And the worst of the trouble would come from the Romans who would stop any unrest with violent force whether it was needed or not.

Now today, we once again get the chance to eavesdrop on a private meeting of the Jewish council. The day before this meeting takes place, the order was given by Joseph Caiaphas and the Sadducees to arrest the apostles because they were jealous of them as Luke writes in Acts 5. As the disciples sat in prison that same night, an angel appeared and opened the cell door and led them out of the prison. And while they were leaving, the angel instructed them to go back to the temple the next day to proclaim the Gospel to the people once again, the very thing that got them thrown into prison in the first place!

When Joseph Caiaphas arrived the next morning, he called the council together, and ordered that the apostles be brought before them. Given the way that they had already framed Jesus, you can imagine what these men were prepared to do with the apostles. But when the officers return from the prison, they report that the doors were locked up tight, the guards were on duty and alert, and the apostles were absolutely nowhere to be found. Luke tells us that as they were trying to figure out what happened, a report arrived that the very same men that they were looking for were once again in the temple courts teaching people about the Gospel of Jesus. Once again, the order is given to bring them before the council, but force is not to be used because they are afraid that a riot might break out due to the popularity of their message. While they are being questioned by the council, the high priest declares, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” And that’s where today’s reading picks the account up.

The apostles answer the high priest’s accusation by declaring that, “We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and

forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

This is definitely not the response that the council was expecting! The members are enraged by the attitude of the apostles, and are ready to kill them then and there. It’s an amazing response when you remember their bold proclamation before Pontius Pilate that the blood of Jesus should be on their heads and on the heads of their children! How quickly they have forgotten their bold words! And now that they are faced with their own words, and the truth of who Jesus is, they are furious with the ones who are proclaiming God’s Law to them. They know their guilt, and rather than admit it, they want to get rid of those who are forcing them to acknowledge it.

But one of the most respected council members, Gamaliel who ironically is the mentor of the man that will eventually become St. Paul, isn’t ready to act in his anger. He has the apostles removed, and here is where we get to eavesdrop on the conversation that takes place in this closed session of the council. First, Gamaliel reminds them of past movements that have disappeared because they were obviously led by false prophets, but then he says to them, “...So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!” Gamaliel shows that he is probably the only member of the entire council of Israel who is willing to admit the possibility that these men could be for real. He’s the only one who will acknowledge that God’s Will just might be at work here. Gamaliel knows the Law, and he hints at the dangers that come from not listening to God.

When you don’t listen to the Gospel of God’s Word, you risk losing everything, especially your eternal salvation. Thomas refused to listen to the Gospel that the other apostles

told him, and he almost missed sharing in the joys of the resurrection. Joseph Caiaphas doesn't listen, and he will surely be tormented by the guilt of what he did to Jesus. When we don't listen to the Lord's Word, we will find ourselves on the outside looking in. Today's Gospel lesson from the book of John states it nicely, "These things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name."

It took a miraculous appearance of Jesus, Himself, but Thomas finally got the message and believed, so He had life in Christ's name. When Thomas was given the chance to see the wounds of Jesus as he had demanded, he made a grand statement of faith, "My Lord, and my God!" But he got to see the risen Christ. Thomas was able to look through and even feel the holes in the Lord's hands, feet and side. We aren't given that privilege. We need to listen, and the Holy Spirit does the rest.

It is the Holy Spirit who testifies to the truth of the resurrection for us. He shows us the resurrected Jesus in the Sacrament of the Altar as we are given the body and blood of Christ. He shows us the resurrected Jesus in the Word to bring us to faith and to give us life in His name, and He shows us the resurrected Jesus as He binds us to His death and resurrection in the waters of Holy Baptism.

The apostles were given strength to obey God instead of men, and we are promised that same strength when we are pressured by the world to ignore the Gospel. He gives us the strength to hear, to believe and then to share His Gospel message with the world around us. The message that has been proven to be true in the very way that Gamaliel said it would be. The Gospel of Christ's death and resurrection has endured for more than 2000 years, not because it was a good legend, but because it is witnessed to by God Himself in the Holy Spirit. He confirms to us that Jesus is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia. Amen.