

**“Cut to the heart”**  
**Acts 2:14a, 36-42**  
**Brentwood First Presbyterian Church**  
**4/6/08**  
**Mike Magee**

**Movement 1 “This Jesus whom you crucified ... [and] when they heard this, they were cut to the heart”**

Today is my second message in a series we began last week on the book of Acts. Which scholars say is better thought of as Acts of God’s Spirit than as Acts of the Apostles. Lets go back in time to the days of Peter’s first message in Jerusalem. Can you see the smug crowd walking by the market podium? Can you see them scoffing at that crazy street corner preacher? What is his name, Peter? What a strange name? Who would want to be named after a rock, for heaven’s sake. You see, unlike today, Peter was not a common name 2000 years ago. Let’s listen again to part of what he had to say.

“God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified ... [and] when they heard this, they were cut to the heart”

Have you ever been cut to the heart? I have been, many times. I told you about one time last year. I was so smug when I rolled down my window to give a dollar bill to a homeless man standing on the southbound entrance ramp from Church Street onto I-40, one cold January evening. And I told you the man in the car behind me also rolled down his window. But instead of giving him a dollar bill, he literally took the coat off his back and gave to him. I’ll bet you can think of times when you were cut to the heart. When you were smug because of your accomplishments, or of your status, or of how much money you have saved. And then along comes someone who trumps you. Like play the card game Rook. You play what you think is the highest card in the suit being played, but someone lays down a low numbered trump card, and carries away all the points. In matters of the heart, I rather think it is not really another person who trumps you, but it is God. I do not think it is the man who gave away his coat, who trumped my one dollar bill. I think it was God putting me in my place.

We say the Jews, or the Romans, or someone else crucified Jesus, don’t we. Not our fault. We do not take ownership of that catastrophe. But is that really true? I am going to give you now a moment to turn in your Bible to Matthew 25: verse 44. Do you remember Jesus saying this in Matthew 25? “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you? Then he will answer them, truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it unto me.” We say the Jews or the Romans crucified Jesus? The truth is, we crucify Jesus every day. Peter is not just speaking to a Jewish audience 2000 years ago, he is also speaking to us.

But the words Lord and Messiah, which roll off our tongues so glibly, cut to the heart Peter's original audience even further. We need to understand their original meaning to find out why they cut his audience to the heart.

## **Movement 2 "God has made him both Lord and Messiah"**

We frequently do not make the distinction between Jesus' titles, do we? But the original audience for Peter's first sermon 2000 years ago did not conflate the words "Lord" and "Messiah" like we do today. They had different meanings then. And you know what, they have different meanings today also. The Greek **κύριος**, what is translated into English as Lord, means one who possesses authority, who is in charge of someone. It is like when a parent tells an older child to watch out for a younger child. To be sure when the younger child crosses the street, that the younger child holds hands and looks both ways. How much more does Jesus take charge of us? We certainly don't expect the younger child to call the older child "Lord," but this is what is meant by the original Greek, one who possesses authority or who is in charge. The One who Jesus called "Abba," translated, "Daddy," put Jesus in charge of us. Put Jesus in charge of interpreting the Hebrew Bible, and in charge of speaking a new Word to us. God put Jesus in charge.

When we hear the word, "Messiah," we think of Handel's magnificent choral music, don't we? That word has also lost its original meaning. But **מָשִׁיחַ**, a Hebrew word, translated **Χριστός** in Greek, is translated into English, "the anointed one." It is like Samuel anointing the young shepherd boy, David, to be the king of all of Israel. It is like a presidential inauguration. How much more power is conferred at the anointing of Jesus by John the Baptizer in the River Jordan? Before Peter's first sermon, his audience thought of the **מָשִׁיחַ** of which the Hebrew Bible spoke, as the anointed king who was going to lead them out of subjugation to the Romans. Who was going to save them from the Romans. But in Peter's first sermon, he preaches a different kind of salvation. Peter preaches that the one they were waiting for has already come, that his physical body has left, and that he has left behind God's Spirit. That the anointed one came not to save them from the Romans, but from their deeds that led to their brokenness, isolation, and fear. That is, save them from their sin. The anointed one, whom the Hebrews call **מָשִׁיחַ**, leads us out of isolation into relationship, brokenness into wholeness, and fear into confidence and generosity.

God put Jesus in charge of us, and anointed Jesus for a specific task, to save us from our spiritual woes. From our sins. And this Jesus, they crucified. He has come and his physical body has left. Peter's audience has missed its opportunity to pay homage to and sit at the feet of Jesus. And they do not know what to do. We are in the same boat, aren't we? We also miss opportunities every day, don't we? We have missed opportunities to feed the hungry or the thirsty. Or welcome a visitor or cloth the naked. Or visit the sick or those in prison. We are cut to the

heart because of our missed opportunities, and we do not know what to do. So Peter tells them, and us, what to do.

### **Movement 3 “Repent, ... be baptized, ... and ... receive ... the Holy Spirit”**

What is the secret, you may ask? What is it that a church is supposed to do? Is it to draw boundaries around itself, making itself a citadel of purity? Is it a place where the word love is only a noun or an adjective? Or is the church a body without boundaries? Is the church a place where love is not just a noun or an adjective, but is also a verb?

Peter tells them, and us, what to do. He tells them to repent. I believe some modern preachers are confused about what repent means. It does not mean beating yourself literally or metaphorically. It means change. Change your ways. Stop doing whatever it is that creates brokenness, isolation, or fear. And start feeding the hungry, welcoming a visitor, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick and those in prison. He tells them to partner with a church in Baptism, breaking the bread of fellowship, worshiping, praying, and studying scripture. And finally, he tells them to receive the Holy Spirit. God’s Spirit. And God’s Spirit is not passive. God’s Spirit is active.

I dropped my first Biblical interpretation class at Vanderbilt Divinity School. I dropped it because the teacher challenged me. He told the class that God is not a noun. God is a verb. This shocked me. I had an image of God as a white man in a beard sitting on a throne in the clouds. At least that is the image from my childhood SS class. When thought of as a noun, God always has the skin color of the one creating the image. In my mind, after hearing my teacher in divinity school, I ran screaming from his class and never came back. It was two years before I took that required class again, when I could get a different teacher.

But you know what, he may be on to something. God’s nature that of a verb. Not a smug noun, but a verb. Not a passive verb, but an active verb. If God’s nature is that of a verb, which verb would it be? Lets see. God our heavenly parent creates us. Through Jesus, God reconciles us. And through God’s Spirit, God inspires us. And how can we summarize all this? The most renowned theologian of last century was Karl Barth. On his death bed, someone asked him what was the most important message in the Bible. Do you know what Dr Barth did? He started singing. Do you know what he sang? “Jesus loves me, this I know. For the Bible tells me so. Little ones to him belong. They are weak but he is strong. Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me. The Bible tells me so.”

**Glory be to God, Hallelujah, and all God’s children say ...**

**Invitation:**

**Benediction:**

**Jesus tells us that just as he loves us, so we are to actively love one another. Unconditionally, with forgiveness, and without boundaries.**