

"Says Who?"

Text: Acts 11:1-18

God grant to each of us this one gift in particular this morning – that we learn, at all times and in every situation, to act as humble messengers of God's Word and will. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

I'll wager that most, if not all, remember the old "Say's who?" of your youth. It was the go-to whenever a sibling dared issue a command: "You have to come in now?" "Oh yeah? Says who?" Your brother or sister was just never the boss of you. Orders issued by peers carried no weight whatsoever and were never considered binding. If a brother or sister could not provide a higher authority behind the command, the command could (must) be safely ignored – thus the "Says who?"

Sometimes the messenger would test the waters of their own authority by withholding the identity of the power behind the order. They would pretend that they themselves possessed the authority to dictate the actions of their siblings. If the order was obeyed, they won a small victory in their ongoing campaign to assert their dominance. Only if it was not obeyed would they play that highest of all trump cards: "Mom said so." Younger siblings in particular still garnered some swagger by acting as mom's emissary, but not as much as they might have.

Interestingly enough, many adults never seem to fully outgrow this silly game. They continue to pretend that their authority extends much farther than it does. Christians are not immune, which is why we need the constant reminder that we are always and only messengers of a Higher Authority. Nothing is true, right, or binding simply because we say so. It is always and only because God says so. Which also means we better be rock-solid sure of what God has actually said.

We find the perfect illustration of this truth in our text for this morning, found recorded in the Book of Acts, the 11th Chapter:

^{ESV} **Acts 11:1-18** *Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. ² So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, ³ "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them." ⁴ But Peter began and explained it to them in order: ⁵ "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, something like a great sheet descending, being let down from*

heaven by its four corners, and it came down to me. ⁶ Looking at it closely, I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. ⁷ And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' ⁸ But I said, 'By no means, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' ⁹ But the voice answered a second time from heaven, 'What God has made clean, do not call common.' ¹⁰ This happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven. ¹¹ And behold, at that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea. ¹² And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. ¹³ And he told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; ¹⁴ he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.' ¹⁵ As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. ¹⁶ And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' ¹⁷ If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" ¹⁸ When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."

This is God's Word. It is, therefore, not just our highest authority, it is our *only* authority. God's Word alone is true and right in every conceivable way. Perfect, from first to last. In this sin-riddled world, how rare and wonderful it is to have something completely and utterly reliable and authoritative. Asking our God to bless us through the study of his perfect words this morning, so we pray, "**Sanctify us by the truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!**" Amen.

There are obviously many dangers of various kinds in our day. I'm not sure, however, that any is more dangerous than group-think. The poster child for this problem is the petition that sought support in banning dihydrogen monoxide, which was listed as the major component of acid rain, corrosive to many metals, caused severe burns, was found in virtually every excised cancer tumor, caused electrical and brake failures in cars, contributes to the "greenhouse effect," and it is fatal when aspirated by human beings. Tens of thousands signed various petitions to ban the chemical, only to be told that they had just voted to ban H₂O (or water).

The petition drive was designed to reveal just how gullible we human beings can be. Someone comes up with an ill-conceived idea that has the *sound* or *appearance* of wisdom, and an alarming number of people are instantly on-board.

While such things can be dangerous in secular things, how much worse when carried over into the spiritual. Yet it happens all the time. *"I wonder if maybe Jesus only rose symbolically in people's minds"* suddenly becomes *"It's a well-known fact that the Bible never says Jesus actually rose bodily from the dead."* From there it's a tiny little hop to *"You don't actually believe that myth about Jesus' resurrection, do you?"* That is in fact exactly how time-honored, rock-solid Biblical truths get turned on their ear, twisted, perverted, and discarded. Group-think is just another ploy of the devil to transfer authority from God to man. If a sufficient number of human-beings believe something to be true, they can essentially overrule God.

It is with all of this in mind that we pick up in our text for this morning at this point: ***So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them."*** Interestingly enough, not only were there one or two individuals back at the home church in Jerusalem that still believed that circumcision was necessary for one to be saved, there was an entire group or ***"party"*** of them. There was, in other words, spiritual group-think.

The background of our text was that Peter had baptized non-Jews (Gentiles) in Caesarea, and was then summoned by the church in Jerusalem to give an explanation. Our text represents his defense of his actions, given to his Christian brothers in Jerusalem. Clearly the men in Jerusalem were missing the forest for the trees. We have no record that they rejoiced that also non-Jews were saved. They did not immediately celebrate the fact that human beings— who happened to have something other than Jewish blood circulating in their veins — were being rescued from the eternal torments of hell. They were instead obsessed with protocol, procedure, and custom. The Jews in particular were susceptible to this. You remember how the Jewish leaders had no problem bribing witnesses to falsely condemn Jesus to death, yet wouldn't enter Pilate's courtroom because it would ceremonially defile them, rendering them unfit to celebrate the Passover the following day. Lie, yes. Murder, yes. Violate ceremonial customs, never. This obvious disconnect is something akin to the Romans priding themselves on how well they cared for their lions — all so that they could be healthy and vigorous when they were called upon to devour entire Christian families in the Coliseum. Group-think makes such things possible. If enough agree, it must be okay.

Nor was Peter exempted, was he? In fact when in a vision God told him to do something, Peter didn't just response with a *"Says who?"* but went right to *"No way, Lord."* Clearly he couldn't defend his refusal on the basis of *"Says who?"* He was, after all, having his conversation with the Lord. Peter obviously acknowledged this fact by saying, ***"By no means, Lord!"*** You can't really use *"Says who?"* when it is *God* himself who is telling you to do something else.

The point that all of the individuals in this account failed to grasp — at least for a time — was that the time of transition had come to God's Church. It was time for them to move from Old Testament to New — by God's authority. Because God said so. Part of that transition was learning that all of the Old Testament ceremonies and sacrifices became obsolete the moment Jesus said ***"It is finished!"*** on the cross of Calvary. All of those ceremonies and customs pointed ahead to Christ. Once Christ came, their usefulness ended. Think of it this way. Suppose you received an invitation to some special event, only to forget about that event until you happened to find that invitation tucked away in an organizer or drawer long after the event had come and gone. Does the invitation still apply? Does it hold any real value? Obviously not. All it does is remind you of what you forgot, and therefore what you missed missed.

The problem was that these men had come to regard the Old Testament rules, ceremonies, and sacrifices as an end unto themselves, rather than as that which pointed to the event itself. In fact they were so adamant in this that when the Promised One finally came, they discarded *him* instead of the outdated invitation.

So Peter, finally convinced by God the Holy Spirit that things had indeed changed, made his case to his brothers in Jerusalem. Their reaction was both disturbing and informative. Our text says, ***"When they heard these things they fell silent..."*** Why silent? Because they were temporarily at a loss. They couldn't challenge Peter with a *"Says who?"* because the answer was obviously God himself. In fact Peter's entire defense of why he did what he did was one big long answer to *"Says who?"*

That works, doesn't it? It worked for the Church in Jerusalem; it works for us. The end of the matter in Jerusalem was recorded in the last verse of our text: ***And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."*** The Jews had to be purged of their last bit of prideful self-love, which was their notion that God saved them because they were Jews, and

therefore somehow worthy – certainly more worthy or more deserving than non-Jews. God's conversion of gentiles in Caesarea, irrefutably proved by God when he gave them the same gift of the Holy Spirit that he had given the disciples at Pentecost, that proof silenced them, and they seemed to almost begrudgingly glorify God for what he had done.

You and I need to learn that same acceptance based on nothing other than *"God said so."* That is, in fact, the basis of our entire hope and confidence. You and I are forgiven sinners. Why? Because *God* said so. He said so with the empty tomb and the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. He said so in his Word, repeatedly, in passages like Psalm 103:11-12: ***"For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us."*** And again in Romans 8:1: ***"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in (who believe in) Christ Jesus."*** You and I are forgiven sinners. God himself said so. We need no further proof or evidence because no higher authority exists.

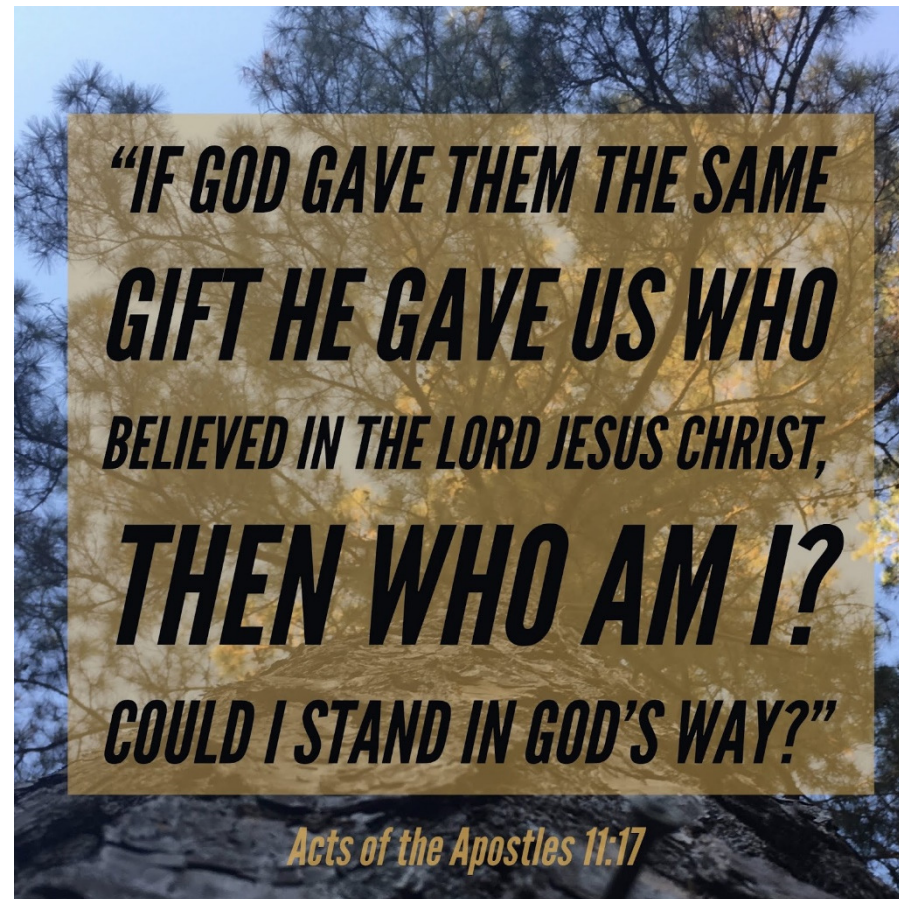
Life then becomes relatively simple for God's washed, cleansed, forgiven children. We are not burdened by having to work through issues to decide what we think or feel. We have, in God's Word, clear communication of the only Authority that matters. What are we supposed to do? Whatever God says. Why? Because *God* says so. This is the rare joy and privilege that is ours – to have a God that we can trust to tell us always and only not only what is true and right, but what is best for us. To have a God that not only loved us in the past so much that he sacrificed his own dear Son to pay for what we owed, but who also loves us so much today that he will not allow Satan to remove us from that good, perfect place to which he has brought us. How do you know that God loves you? Because God said so. When you die you will be carried by your Savior to the eternal joy of heaven. Says who? Says that same Savior: ***"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ² In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.***

^{ESV}(John 14:1-3). Amen.

ESV **Revelation 21:1-7** Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." ⁵ ¶ And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶ And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. ⁷ The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

ESV **John 13:31-35** When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. ³² If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. ³³ Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.' ³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

ESV **Acts 11:1-18** Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. ² So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, ³ "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them." ⁴ But Peter began and explained it to them in order: ⁵ "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, something like a great sheet descending, being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to me. ⁶ Looking at it closely, I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. ⁷ And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' ⁸ But I said, 'By no means, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' ⁹ But the voice answered a second time from heaven, 'What God has made clean, do not call common.' ¹⁰ This happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven. ¹¹ And behold, at that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea. ¹² And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. ¹³ And he told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; ¹⁴ he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.' ¹⁵ As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. ¹⁶ And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' ¹⁷ If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" ¹⁸ When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."



ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501
Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483
Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org
Mick Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist
Michael Roehl, Pastor

The Fourth Sunday after Easter – May 15, 2022

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 779 (Stanzas 1-3) (Brown Hymnal)
"Redeemed, Restored, Forgiven"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*

The First Lesson: (Revelation 21:1-7) It is important, when reading in the Book of Revelation, to remember that John is describing a vision. The images in that vision symbolized truth that God wanted to convey to the Church. In our first reading we see an image of heaven – the New Jerusalem. For mortal man, just exactly what heaven will be like is infinitely beyond our ability to fully comprehend, so God used pictures that we can somewhat grasp. The heaven that we will one day experience will actually exceed our wildest expectations. Thank you, Jesus!

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 84 (Page 38)

The Second Lesson: (John 13:31-35) Jesus here tells his followers that no one can follow him. Clearly he meant that the cross was for him alone. Jesus paid the penalty for sin all by himself, for he alone was worthy. You and I publicly state our allegiance to Jesus by the love we show to our neighbor. Not only is this love something other than an emotion, it is also anything but permissive. It is an outward directed love based on the truth of God's Word. True love includes bringing to our neighbor's attention both what our God promotes and what he condemns.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15 *(Brown Hymnal)*

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 746 (Brown Hymnal)

"Father Most Holy, Merciful and Tender"

The Sermon – Text: Acts 11:1-18 (Printed on the back of this bulletin)

"Says Who?"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 377 (Stanzas 1-2, 5-6) (Red Hymnal)

"Salvation unto Us has Come"

The Prayer followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 779 (Stanza 4) (Brown Hymnal)
"Redeemed, Restored, Forgiven"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States and around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

Attendance – Sunday (33) Average (30)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
	-11:15 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship with Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor John Hein is considering the call to Immanuel of Winter Haven. Pastor David Ude is considering the call to Redemption of Lynnwood. This Friday, May 20, is the final day of classes at ILC. Class Day will be held at 3 pm and the annual Spring Concert at 7:30 pm. Graduation is scheduled for this Saturday, May 21, at 10 am.

Vacuum Cleaner – A new vacuum cleaner has been purchased for the church. Several have expressed interest in helping to defray this unanticipated cost. Offerings should be marked "Vacuum" and dropped in the offering box.

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is scheduled to meet this morning during the fellowship hour.

Summer Schedule – Next Sunday, May 22, is the last Sunday of our regular schedule. This Wednesday, May 18, is the final midweek Bible Class. It goes without saying that our individual and family devotions do not take the summer off.

Daily Rest – Subscriptions for the devotional Daily Rest are due for renewal. Please consult the sheet on the mailbox table. Payment can be dropped into the offering box and need not be specially marked.

Online Contributions – As requested, an online contribution feature has been added to our website. Please forward any feedback to any Council member.