

## ***This is a dangerous sermon***

Acts 2:14a, 22-32

Mark Schloneger

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Everywhere you look, there are warnings reminding you to be careful.

On a Starbucks cup: “Careful, the beverage you are about to enjoy is extremely hot.”

On a super glue bottle, it says this:

“Warning: Bonds instantly. Do not swallow. Do not get in eyes.”

A beach ball, for those of you that are wondering,  
is not to be used as a life-saving device.

There are cautions and warnings like these on so many things that we buy  
that we hardly pay them any attention.

And that’s fine, because, for the most part, we already know all these things.

We know how to take appropriate cautions without reading all the labels.

Yet, it raises the question – are we more careful with our coffee than we are with our worship?

Author Annie Dillard, writes,

“On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside of the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? We should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return.”<sup>1</sup>

“Or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return.”

When the Holy Spirit was poured out on the believers at Pentecost,

they began speaking in other languages,

and even Jewish converts from other nations heard what they were saying.

Some were bewildered and asked each other, “What does this mean?”

Others, though, made fun of them, saying that they had too much wine. (Acts 2:12-13)

But Peter raised his voice to address them.

and our verses this morning are part of what he said:

Acts, chapter 2, verses 14-15, and 22-32.

This is what he said:

*“Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem,  
let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say.  
These people are not drunk, as you suppose.  
It’s only nine in the morning!” (Acts 2:14-15)*

Now, I’ve got to pause here just to say this,

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<sup>1</sup> Annie Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk*, Harper and Row, 1982.

if there is a more brilliant way to begin a sermon,  
I have yet to hear it.

But Peter continued.

After quoting the prophet Joel, he said this:

*“You that are Israelites,  
listen to what I have to say:  
Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs  
that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know—  
this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God,  
you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. (Acts 2:22-23)*

I’m going to call a timeout here.

Every time we as Christians recite verses like this:

we need to remind ourselves of the deeply anti-semitic history of their interpretation.

So, let’s remember, Peter was a Jew, talking to Jews in Jerusalem,  
and the New Testament writers make it clear  
that all of us are culpable in Jesus’ crucifixion.

Time back in.

Peter is standing before all these people in Jerusalem,

and he isn’t about to cover up what happened in order to make his audience feel better.

He says,

[This man you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law --]  
*God raised him up, having freed him from death,  
because it was impossible for him to be held in its power.*

*For David says concerning him,  
‘I saw the Lord always before me,  
for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken;  
therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;  
moreover my flesh will live in hope.  
For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,  
or let your Holy One experience corruption.  
You have made known to me the ways of life;  
you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’*

*“Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David  
that he both died and was buried,  
and his tomb is with us to this day.  
Since he was a prophet,  
he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him  
that he would put one of his descendants on his throne.  
Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying,*

*'He was not abandoned to Hades,  
nor did his flesh experience corruption.'*  
*This Jesus God raised up,  
and of that all of us are witnesses. (Acts 2:24-32)*

Caution: This is a dangerous sermon.

When Peter finished speaking,

the people who heard them were, as Acts tells us, "cut to the heart"  
and, in the name of Jesus,

roughly three thousand people were baptized for the forgiveness of sins.

The Spirit was poured out on many that day.

for the waking God drew them out to where they could never return.

The message that Peter proclaimed,

is not merely one story among many.

What we celebrate at Easter is not simply a happy ending to a messy event.

No, Easter is the first day of God's new creation.

And so, we who are followers of Jesus,

are not so much living in the last days

as we're living in the first days – the days of new creation,

and our task is to implement, by the Spirit's power,

the victory that God has achieved in Jesus,

the victory that is coming to a final consummation.

You know, it was a month ago, that we canceled our worship services at our church building.

I don't know about you, but for me, that seems so, so long ago.

That's because so much has changed since then:

stores have closed, traffic is down, people are working from home,

churches and schools are meeting on-line, we're wearing face masks, and so on.

With the pandemic as our reference point,

we can lament all that we're missing,

and we can long for things to return as they were.

I read an article this week entitled "Prepare for the Ultimate Gaslighting", by Philip Vincent Gambuto.

I encourage you to read it.<sup>2</sup>

Gambuto says this:

"Pretty soon, as the country begins to figure out how we 'open back up' and move forward, very powerful forces will try to convince us all to get back to normal. Billions of dollars will be spent on advertising, messaging, to make us feel comfortable again."

This need for comfort is real, and every brand in America will come to rescue you in your desire to get back to where you were.

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<sup>2</sup> Philip Vincent Gambuto, "[Prepare for the Ultimate Gaslighting](#)", Forge, (April 10, 2020).

But we have been given a Great Pause,  
and it has given us a chance to look at ourselves and our country in the plainest of views.  
We've been given a chance to see what would happen if things simply stopped,  
and this has brought to light all the beautiful and painful truths about how we live.

But soon, we will all be urged to get back to the way things were,  
to forget about what we've seen:  
You didn't see inequality.  
You didn't see indifference.  
You didn't see hospitals overrun,  
people with masks waiting in long lines to register their vote,  
you didn't see people with guns rallying to re-open America at State capitals.  
You didn't see centuries of racism reflected in infection and hospitalization rates.  
Not in America.<sup>3</sup>

But before we begin entering into the way things were:  
let's re-orient our lives to the way things are –  
the way things are in our own lives, in our community, in our country, in our world;  
the way things are according in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

And so, as Menno Simons wrote:  
"True evangelical faith cannot lie dormant,  
but spreads itself out in all kinds of righteousness and fruits of love;  
it seeks, serves and fears God in its inmost soul;  
it clothes the naked  
it feeds the hungry  
it comforts the sorrowful;  
it shelters the destitute  
it serves those that harm it;  
it prays for those who persecute it;  
it teaches, admonishes and judges us with the Word of the Lord;  
it seeks those who are lost;  
it binds up what is wounded;  
it heals the sick;  
it becomes all things to all people."

Caution: This is a dangerous message,  
for the waking God is drawing us to where we can never return.

So put on your crash helmets,  
and get ready,  
*"The world for which you have been so carefully prepared is being taken away from you..."*

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

*by the grace and for the glory of God.”*

(Barbara Brown Taylor, *Leaving Church*, quoting Walter Brueggemann)