

ST ARMANDS KEY LUTHERAN CHURCH
SARASOTA, FLORIDA

COME, JOIN THE CONVERSATION

ON

PETER AND **THE FIRST EPISTLE** THAT BEARS HIS NAME

CONVERSATION PLAN for Thursday –October 30, 2014

Session #3 – “Peter & Paul and the Christian Revolution”

Episode II

GENERAL INTRODUCTIONS: - briefly - who are we who have gathered today in Ogram Hall?

READING FROM SCRIPTURE: ACTS 5:12-32

“Many miracles and wonders were being performed among the people by the apostles. All the believers met together in Solomon’s Porch. Nobody outside the group dared join them, even though the people spoke highly of them. But more and more people were added to the group – a crowd of men and women who believed in the Lord. As a result of what the apostles were doing, sick people were carried out into the streets and placed on beds and mats so that at least Peter’s shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. And crowds of people came in from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing those who were sick or who had evil spirits in them; and they were all healed.

Then the High Priest and all his companions, members of the local party of the Sadducees, became extremely jealous of the apostles; so they decided to take action. They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. But that night an angel of the Lord opened the prison gates, led the apostles out, and said to them, ‘Go and stand in the Temple and tell the people all about this new life.’ The apostles obeyed, and at dawn they entered the Temple and started teaching.

The High Priest and his companions called together all the Jewish elders, for a full meeting of the Council; then they sent orders to the prison to have the apostles brought before them. But when the officials arrived, they did not find the apostles in prison, so they returned to the Council and reported, ‘When we arrived at the jail, we found it locked up tight and all the guards on watch at the gates; but when we opened the gates we found no one inside.’ When the chief priests and the officials in charge of the temple guards heard this, they wondered what had happened to the apostles. Then a man came in and said to them, ‘The men you put in prison are in the Temple teaching the people!’ So the officer went off with his men and brought the apostles back. They did not use force, however, because they were afraid that the people might stone them.

They brought the apostles in, made them stand before the Council, and the High Priest questioned them. ‘We gave you strict orders not to teach in the name of this man,’ he said; ‘but see what you have done! You have spread your teaching all over Jerusalem, and you want to make us responsible for his death!’

Peter and the other apostles answered, ‘We must obey God, not men. The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from death, after you had killed him by nailing him to a cross. God raised him to his right side as Leader and Savior, to give the people of Israel the opportunity to repent and have their sins forgiven. We are witnesses to these things – we and the Holy Spirit, who is God’s gift to those who obey him.’” (GOOD NEWS

BIBLE – TEV)

PRAYER IN UNISON: “ALMIGHTY GOD, WHOSE BLESSED APOSTLES PETER AND PAUL GLORIFIED YOU BY THEIR MARTYRDOM: GRANT THAT YOUR CHURCH INSTRUCTED BY THEIR TEACHING AND EXAMPLE, AND KNIT TOGETHER IN UNITY BY YOUR SPIRIT, MAY EVER STAND FIRM UPON THE ONE FOUNDATION, WHICH IS JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD, WHO LIVES AND REIGNS WITH YOU AND THE HOLY SPIRIT, ONE GOD, NOW AND FOREVER. AMEN.” (*The Prayer of the Day for the Festival of St. Peter and St. Paul, Apostles – June 29th*)

THE MUTUAL SHARING OF PEACE BY GOD’S PEOPLE

A LOOK AT OBJECTIVES FOR THIS SESSION:

- To further expand on our knowledge of Saints Peter & Paul, and our appreciation of their role as apostles;
- to explore additional evidence of several meetings between those two apostles;
- to examine the understanding of contemporary theologians and biblical historians regarding still more pivotal points in the ancient development of Judaism’s ‘Jesus Sect’;
- to appreciate the historical writings of Josephus, Tacitus, et. al., and to appreciate the benefit of studying Scripture using the Historical-Critical method of biblical interpretation;
- to consider how we deal with conflict and major differences in today’s church in light of evidence provided about the past.

1. Facilitator’s General Introduction to “Peter & Paul” – Video Episode 2

Spread outside Judea by missionaries like Peter and Paul, the Jesus Sect caught hold like ‘wild fire’ among Jews and non-Jews in many parts of the Roman Empire. This success, however, was met with challenges: challenges from hostile locals; challenges from Roman Imperial forces; and, challenges from conflicting ideas/teachings within the movement itself. Should all males be circumcised? What about observance of ancient dietary laws? These were ‘hot-button’ issues in the first century CE and threatened to tear the church apart. Paul entered into open and angry confrontation with some of the oldest Jesus followers. Peter, it appears, tried to mediate the conflict, and for a critical period, helped to keep the movement together. But the ‘truce’ was short lived, and Paul set out on his own, planting churches around the Mediterranean. Finally, in 70 CE, disaster struck the ‘headquarters’ of the Jesus Movement. After years of rising tension Judea rose up in revolt against Rome and there was open warfare. When Rome finally regained control, much of Jerusalem lay in ruins; the Temple was torched; the people were enslaved. Jerusalem could no longer nurture a Jewish Jesus Movement. End result – it was Paul’s communities of faith that would grow and change into the Christian churches we know today.

2. Introductions to biblical historians and theologians seen in this video are in Study Plan #2

3. View: “Peter and Paul” – Episode 2 (54:20 minutes)

4. YOUR EVALUATION - GROUP DISCUSSION and FURTHER REFLECTIONS about this video:

- A) What further insights, if any, did you gain into **Peter**'s life, personality and character from seeing this video?
- B) Many of us have previously studied **Paul**'s life and writings. What further insights did you gain about him from seeing this video?
- C) According to **Prof. John Dominic Crossan**, *“those in the Jesus Movement called their Jesus, who Rome had crucified, ‘Lord and Savior, and Son of God, all of which were not pious terms in the first century CE, but titles of Caesar. So, when these people said Jesus is Lord, Rome understood quite clearly they were saying, and you are not!”* Building on this statement, **Prof. Richard Horsley** discussed the role of *“Client Rulers”* and makes specific reference to events occurring in 37 CE. To whom and to what event was Prof. Horsley referring? What direct effect did this event have on Peter and the Jesus Movement?
- D) What was the *‘Pivotal Point’* that seems to have ended Peter’s tenure as leader of the Jesus Movement? How did the Jerusalem community change under the leadership of his successor, James?
- E) What subsequent role does Peter appear to have taken between Paul & James? Did Peter achieve any success in fulfilling that new role?
- F) What did extending the *“Right hand of friendship”* and taking seriously the admonition to *“Remember the Poor”* mean for the growth of the Jesus movement during the decade of the 40’s CE?
- G) Peter is known to have been in the Antioch community about 49 CE, and there had an encounter with Paul which resulted in the latter’s accusing Peter of being *“two-faced.”* What was the issue that provoked this harsh rebuke?
- H) **Prof. Richard Horsley**, in describing the extent of the *“schism”* that divided the Jesus Movement into two camps, cites one chief practice as a possible reason for it. Do you recall Horsley’s observation? Can you draw any similarities between then and now?

- I) Over their respective years, Peter and Paul experienced somewhat similar breakdowns in their personal appeal, and the esteem in which they were held by the people to whom they ministered. How did each deal with it? Is this an inevitable consequence of ministry?
- J) In the year 56 CE, Paul travelled to Judea to deliver the promised offering for the Jerusalem Church. What do you think were Paul's expectations? Is there any evidence of his having achieved any success?
- K) **Prof. Amy-Jill Levine**, at the conclusion of the video, states – *“Peter and Paul allowed the church to grow. They took a movement that expected Jesus to come back and bring in the Kingdom of God immediately, and turned it into a movement that lasted for generation after generation. They took a proclamation which makes sense primarily, if not only to Jews living in the Galilean Judea, and rephrased it in a way so that it made sense to Gentiles in the wider world. They took a proclamation of the Kingdom of God and made it palpable; made it meaningful to people who have never heard of that God and could not imagine a Kingdom other than the one that Rome had provided. Without Peter and Paul we would not have the church as we know it today.”* As a Christian, living in the 21st century CE, how important is it for you to be aware of the cultural and historical conditions of the first century CE, to arrive at a fuller appreciation of the Scriptural texts?
- L) Does knowing about the schisms that existed in the early Jesus Movement, shed any - light meaning - insight - into that which sometimes divides the church today?

DISMISSAL:

GO IN PEACE TO LOVE AND SERVE THE LORD:

THANKS, BE TO GOD!

A) **PREPARATION FOR NEXT WEEK'S SESSION** – November 6, 2014 – Read - **The First Epistle of Peter**