

# *Wading River Congregational Church*

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## **SERMONS IN PRINT**

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**Acts 2:22-41**

*"This Jesus Whom You Crucified"*

Confrontation is something many of us try to avoid – not always successfully, if we bottle up issues until anger seeps out in unexpected times and places! Confrontation comes anyway, simply delayed and more highly charged than if we had dealt with issues sooner! But in our desperate search for “a quiet life,” too many people accept verbal abuse, feel put down, say nothing. At times we *have* to confront people, and to confront the truth. Both are hard to deal with, and we need courage and a certain amount of grace to confront people and truth.

### *1) The Real Story*

The remarkable speeches that come out of the very early Church are a testimony to the grace and courage that the followers of Jesus found to confront the authorities with the truth. Where did these Galilean fishermen and peasants get the nerve, and get the words? Two places: repeated meetings with the risen Jesus over a period of six weeks between his Resurrection and his Ascension, and a week later, receiving the power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Suddenly the men who had fled when Jesus was arrested - and especially Peter who had sworn he “did not know the man” - were on the street preaching, healing, organizing a new community of the followers of Jesus.

Peter had been forgiven and restored and re-commissioned by the risen Jesus, and “filled with the Holy Spirit” at Pentecost. Now he confronts the authorities and the crowds in Jerusalem with the true story of what has happened there. It is, he says, about a real man – Jesus from Nazareth, whom you all knew. You were fully aware that he was more than a rabbi, even if his words were wonderful! But he healed too many people, did too many miracles, to be only a teacher. He was in fact “accredited by God by his miracles, signs and wonders, as you well know!”

Now signs are just that – they point to something – they are nothing in themselves. What did they point to? What did it all mean? Didn't you ever stop to ask yourselves? God was doing something in and through that man – did you ever try to confront the truth of what that meant? But no – you succumbed to the political calculus that he was a trouble-maker who would be better off dead! You leaders of Israel, together with the Romans – the “wicked men” – conspired to have him crucified along with the other thieves and insurrectionists and brigands who roam the land! You put him to death, “nailed to a cross” – a real death in a real place outside the city wall of Jerusalem. You all know what happened.

*"But! But God! But God raised him from the dead!"* God was at work in this Jesus, whom you thought so much of for a while, and then let go to his death. God brought him back from the tomb: and we met him over and over for six whole weeks! We are witnesses to the reality that he rose! Because God was at work in him in a mighty way, death "could not hold him" - he burst out of the tomb! The tomb could not hold him any more than a pregnant woman can "hold" a child in her womb. He came out of the tomb, alive! It was a real resurrection of a real man whom you all knew, and it happened right here in our city!

Oh yes, like everyone except the Sadducees - that bunch of aristocratic priestly collaborators - you all believe that one day "the resurrection" will occur: God will act decisively, the wicked will be purged, the righteous will be raised, his kingdom will be established! But now it has begun - in this man Jesus from Nazareth, whom you all know! *One man has risen* from the dead, here and now! This is the fulfillment of the dreams, the visions, the prophecies of old, that one day the LORD God would not "abandon us to the grave... but make known to us the path of life." David dreamed it; though it was not about him; it was about this Jesus!

The real story - the true story - of the past seven weeks is that God was at work in Jesus in a unique way, and has demonstrated that he is the Messiah of Israel. *"This Jesus, whom you crucified, God has raised to life... and made him both Lord and Christ."* That is the truth - that is what you leaders, and you people, have now to confront. When Jesus said he was "the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One," you condemned him to death for blasphemy. But God has overruled your verdict, and declared that he is "Christ the Lord"!

## 2) What Shall We Do?

So what do you do when you are confronted with the fact that you have made a huge mistake; that you have been *wrong*? What do you do if someone tells you that you have rejected and killed God's Messiah? "What shall we do?" they ask.

There is only one way. If you have disbelieved God, if you have cast your verdict against him and what he is doing, and then discovered that you were dead wrong, there is only one way: you have to go back to God and say "I was wrong." In Biblical language, that is called "repenting." It means, at root, to turn around and face the other way.

It means not just saying something like "I'm sorry for what I did, or what I didn't do." Sorrow is not repentance. Remorse over what has happened is not repentance. Judas felt remorse over selling Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. Repentance is not being sorry for individual wrongs committed in the past; repentance is having the guts to say to God "I was wrong; I am wrong."

For the inhabitants of Jerusalem in 33 AD, it meant acknowledging that the true story of the events they had witnessed was that God had planned and foreseen and acted in it all to vindicate his Son, the Messiah of Israel, Jesus called the Christ. Repentance meant accepting that they were wrong, and that God was right, and that they should have believed everything Jesus said about himself, and what Peter and the Apostles were now saying. Repent, believe, turn around and walk in the other direction. Be baptized as members of the community of the followers of Jesus. If Jesus is Lord, follow him. That day, says Luke the narrator and historian, over three thousand people repented and believed.

### 3) Repent and Believe

So here is the Easter story. It is not about bunnies and eggs and lilies and tulips, it is not about new life springing from the ground. It is about confronting the truth about Jesus – that God was his Father, and he was right all along about “the child who is born, a Savior who is Christ the Lord” at his birth; about “my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased” at his baptism.

Confronting that truth is both hard and at the same time simple. It means for many if not most of us having to admit that we have for long periods been wrong about Jesus. Oh, there are still some people (God bless them!) who are raised to believe in Jesus as the Christ, God’s Son, and who never really doubt it – their beliefs mature as years go by, but they never turn their back on faith. But for many more people – perhaps most of us today – faith faded with adolescence, or was left at home when we left, or was dissolved by our education, or put on the back - far back - burner by marriage and children and jobs and finances.

Occasionally we maybe venture to take the remnants of our belief out for an airing: weddings, baptisms, funerals, good times like Christmas and Easter. It’s hard to confront the possibility that we may have been wrong about Jesus all these years. If God really did raise a man from the dead; if Jesus of Nazareth really was God in the flesh; if what he said about his mission and our lives was true; if his death was not an accident but God’s plan to redeem people like us – if any or all of that is true, then maybe we have been wrong to ignore him so much.

Maybe we need to turn around and face the facts. That happens in other areas of life – facts catch up with us, our spouse confronts us, our boss calls us into his office, someone

subpoenas our cell phone records. Truth be told, we have been wrong about many things. If we could start all over again, there are lots of things we would do differently: careers, marriages, parenting...

Truth is, there have been moments when we had to make a U-turn and head in a new direction. It’s not easy, admitting that you’re wrong – not at a deep level, anyway. It *sounds* easy: “Sorry I messed up.” “Mistakes were made.” No – those are weasel words, ways of escape, that’s not repentance. “Forgive me, I was totally wrong about you – I was wrong in what I thought, wrong in what I said, wrong in what I did...” “I was too blind to see that I was at fault, not you. Now I see what you have been telling me all along. Forgive me.” Those are real U-turns. That’s repentance.

And that’s where some of us have lived, sometimes for years, in relation to Jesus. Listen, says Peter in his Pentecost speech, “*You got it wrong. This Jesus whom you crucified, God has raised from the dead and declared him to be Lord and Christ.*” Repent and turn back to God, and say “I was wrong – I didn’t know what you were doing... I was wrong, I didn’t know what I was doing.” Jesus knew, of course; “*Father, forgive them,*” he said as they crucified him; “*they do not know what they are doing.*”

Have you, have I, lately, bent the knee and said “Father, forgive me, I was wrong and you were right”? “*I am wrong, even now, whenever I rely on my faith, my achievements - spiritual and otherwise - my sense of well-being, my sense of well-doing, my prospects, my promises... it is only your grace, only your mercy, only Jesus who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, that can put me right.*”

Thank you, Lord, for Easter – and for a day to celebrate what you did in and through

Jesus. Help us to confront him, honestly, face to face, and find your grace and mercy reflected in him.

Let us pray...