

**Sunday, April 24, 2022 – Second Sunday of Easter**  
**“Vindicated”**

Acts 5: 12-32

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Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

It was unseasonably cold, 38 or 40 degrees on a Saturday night that Thanksgiving weekend a dozen years ago when I was driving on I-8 just a stone’s throw from the Mexican border, up in the mountains between San Diego and the low desert basin city of El Centro – I was returning to my home in Orange County from my sister and brother-in-law’s house where I’d spent Thanksgiving. One thing you know if you drive a lot anywhere near the border is that there are occasional US Border Patrol checkpoints. Most cars just get waived through but some get pulled into “secondary” for a more thorough inspection.

Something you need to know about the Chevy Impala I was driving at the time... there was an unexplainable odor in that car, an odor that closely resembled one quite notorious and well-known to law enforcement. I know because several friends who are cops who’ve been passengers in my car and noticed it. Needless to say, I got pulled into secondary, probably well within the definition of “probable cause.” I was wearing a short-sleeved shirt and waited 20 minutes in the wind and the cold while the Border Patrol opened my suitcase, riffled through my trunk, dug into the inside of the front seats and otherwise inspected everything in my car. I was not afraid, as I knew there was nothing to hide... that is, until I kindly asked one of the officers if I could grab a fleece jacket out of the back seat because I was getting cold. He stopped, turned his flashlight my direction and stared me down for a few seconds, saying nothing, before aiming his flashlight back into the car and continuing his work.

Unlike Peter, I had no miracles handy to pave my way before the human authorities. Peter and the other apostles were in Jerusalem, at the temple, a stone’s throw from the High Priest... perhaps the same one, Caiaphas, recorded in the accounts on Jesus’ death. The Sadducees are with him, part of the group from the Sanhedrin that conspired to see Jesus killed. And now here are these followers of this

*convicted criminal*, stirring up more commotion and trouble – healing, doing miracles, riling up the common people. This is trouble. This Jesus thing just isn't dying down. It has to be stopped. You can smell their guilt from a mile away – anything done by anyone in the name of Jesus is guilty by association. It's a closed and shut case. Arrest these men!

Which is exactly what happens. But then, overnight, an angel comes to let them out of prison, commanding them to go and keep on preaching in the name of Jesus – so that is what they do.

Have you ever been falsely suspected? Falsely accused? Falsely charged? Falsely punished? There are degrees to this, of course. A child wrongly blamed for making noise or passing a note misses a few minutes of recess. A person wrongly convicted of murder is wrongly sentenced and perhaps even wrongly killed. I've certainly never experienced anything quite like that. When the officers came back to me that night I got a series of questions. Unable to find any reason to detain me any longer, I got a snarky, "Well, we couldn't find it, so you're free to go." Not exactly vindication – but far from the injustice of a wrongful arrest.

The High Priest convenes the council the next morning. It's time to bring in the rabble-rousers for questioning. The temple guards go to the jail to collect the inmates – but they're not there. The jail was well guarded, the doors secured, but the inmates nowhere to be found. And then someone notices – look, there they are, teaching out in the temple again.

This time, rather than arresting the apostles the guards merely invite and accompany them back to the High Priest. Not exactly vindication – but not quite the injustice of being cuffed and chained and put behind bars. The high priest says to them, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us."

Now, God does care about our obedience to authorities. Authority figures are placed, by God, in order to maintain order and to care for the creation – whether that's in families, workplaces, churches or governments. There is one, and only one time that we aren't required to obey the authorities, and

even then only in a limited way – and that is when they require us to sin. It is why Peter cannot obey the High Priest. There is a higher authority that must be obeyed.

After I was freed to go, I got home and went to the US Customs and Border Patrol website. I filled out a lengthy description of my negative interaction – I respected the job they do and why they had to do it, but some of the way I was spoken to was very unprofessional. I didn't expect anything to come of it, but I felt better. Three weeks later I got a phone call from the person in command at the checkpoint where I'd been pulled over. They had reviewed the video, observed the interaction and proceeded to offer me an apology for the way my interaction went down. Vindicated!

The dictionary defines “vindication” as to, “clear (someone) from blame or suspicion.” Peter’s vindication was far more profound. “The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree.” Arrested, by guilt of association with a convicted criminal, Jesus of Nazareth, Peter testifies as to why that conviction and why that charge to stop speaking of Jesus holds no water. God commands it! Yes, Jesus was convicted by men but was vindicated by God. His sentence was unjust, and the Father overturned it! He was raised, reversing the death sentence, literally *post mortem*. Oh, and now, Jesus is in charge. Peter says, “God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

In other words, “We have to listen to Jesus!” And the healings and miraculous release by the angel are living proof! Vindication! The council would go on to have them beaten, but it is this vindication in the righteousness of their work that allows them to rejoice to suffer even a smidgeon of what Jesus endured.

Jesus is vindicated – in His claim to be God, to forgive sin, be Savior and Leader of the world – by His death sentence being overturned and appointed by His Father. But Jesus isn't raised for His own vindication. He is raised for your and my vindication. You see, satan keeps standing before God, pointing

at you, accusing you. But unlike the unfortunate odor in my car (for which I was completely innocent, by the way), and unlike Jesus' apostles vindicated by the authority of God's power, and unlike Jesus, vindicated by the resurrection and reversal of his conviction to death, satan's accusations against you, and against me... are true. That is, true in part - everything he says *about us* is true - but he conveniently leaves out what Jesus has done. God exalted Him, to give repentance and forgive sins. The reversal of Jesus' conviction to death vindicates you, and me, too - declared innocent before our accuser.

Not every earthly injustice is vindicated in our lifetimes or on timescales with which we'd like - but Jesus rose to vindicate everyone! Names cleared, our blame and suspicion melt away right along with Jesus' wrongful conviction on Calvary, buried in His tomb, never to rise again. In Jesus' name, Amen.