

What They REALLY Hear Acts 2:41-47
Saint Marks UMC, Charleston, WV 4th Sunday of Easter (May 7,) 2017

⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Our THEME in preaching during this season of EASTERTIDE is what Janet introduced two weeks ago: **WITNESSING**. Last Sunday, we examined the problem that we cannot testify to what we have not witnessed. And so often we tend to observe just what we are looking for – instead of seeing the miraculous work of the Kingdom of Heaven that Jesus announced was at hand.

Today, I want us to focus on a very critical component of witnessing – i.e. what the children witness from how they see us live. You know – like my children's sermon prayer usually ends: "Watch over us, God" the children pray, "and watch over the big people, because we are watching them, too."

Can you just imagine what the children saw, who were around when the events in today's scripture were happening. **AWE** came upon them.

Three thousand new ones came into the Way, in response to Peter's preaching, and in response to the **AWE** that came upon them.

- **AWE** – something that carries us beyond the ordinariness of daily life.
- **AWE** – something that leads us to try, and to accomplish, new things.
- **AWE** – something that led 3,000 to join ranks.
- **AWE** – that which led them to share their possessions, from each according to their ability and to each according to their need.
- **AWE**some!

Can you imagine how the children that grew up in their midst were under the influence of that **AWE**?

I've heard some people say that we have lost something in the Church today ... in the world today.

Certainly, we don't have the numbers of people involved in church today that were involved in our parents' generation. And that can be said for every generation that is represented here today in Church.

What **HAVE** the Children been seeing? Hearing? Experiencing?

It's a story we laugh about here at Saint Marks, when I tell about my pastor during my second through fifth grade years, who said he never ate "Deviled Eggs." So, I insist when we make the very same eggs here for covered dish dinners that we call them "Angeled Eggs." It's funny the things we remember from our childhood, that shape our adulthood.

I want to share with you one other thing that this same pastor told in a sermon when I was in the second through fifth grade years – just a little story. It's shaped me more than the little joke about Deviled Eggs and Devil's Food Cake. It goes like this:

On a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks often occur, there was once a little lifesaving station. The building was no more than a hut, and there was only one boat; but the few devoted members kept a constant

watch over the sea. With no thought for themselves, they went out day and night, tirelessly searching for the lost. Most of them did this, because they had once been saved themselves. Many of the people who had been saved, and various others in the surrounding area, were filled with AWE and wanted to be part of the activities of the station. They donated their time, money, and effort to support the work. New boats were bought and new crews trained. The little lifesaving station grew.

Some of these new members of the lifesaving station were unhappy that the building was so crude and poorly equipped. They felt that a more comfortable place should be provided as the first refuge of those who were saved from the sea. They replaced the emergency cots with beds and put better furniture in the enlarged building.

Over time, the lifesaving station became a popular gathering place. Its members decorated it beautifully and furnished it exquisitely, because it had become sort of a club. Fewer members were interested in going to sea on lifesaving missions. “After all,” they said, “we need to take care of our own.” So, they hired lifeboat crews to do this work. The lifesaving motif still prevailed in this club's decoration, and there was a memorial lifeboat in the room where the club initiations were held.

One day, a large ship wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in boatloads of cold, wet, half-drowned people. They were dirty and sick, and many of them were foreign refugees. The beautiful new club was in chaos. Immediately, the property committee hired someone to rig up a shower house outside the club, where victims of shipwrecks could be cleaned up before coming inside.

At the next meeting, there was a split in the club membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club's lifesaving activities because they felt they were unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal social life of the club. A small number of members insisted that lifesaving was their primary purpose, and pointed out that it was still called a lifesaving station. This small group of members was voted down and told that if they wanted to save lives, they could begin their own lifesaving station down the coast.

And so they did.

As the years went by, however, the new station experienced the same changes that had occurred in the old station. It evolved into a club, and then another lifesaving station was founded. History continued to repeat itself, and if you visit that particular seacoast today, you will find a number of exclusive clubs along the shore.

Shipwrecks are frequent in those waters, but most of the passengers drown.

I've heard some other preachers tell this, or a similar, story down through the years. Sometimes, some of the details have been changed. But, since the time I was a child in grade school, that story was what I heard and believed. And, I confess, it has shaped who I am.

And I'm pretty sure that the story is true, because I've seen it acted out down through the decades of my life, just like the story was first told to me.

I wonder what the children, over those same several decades, have been experiencing. Have they experienced things that are merely fun to do, or have they experienced things that cause them to know **AWE**?

Even today, just like in the days of the events described in our scripture, children grow up and become witnesses to what they have actually seen and heard. Are they seeing things that are bigger than they can explain? Are they seeing things that cause them **AWE**?

I wonder.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.