

**Sunday, April 27, 2025**

**2nd Sunday of Easter**

During Easter, the OT texts are taken from the Book of Acts.

### **Acts 5:27-32    "We Must Obey God"**

God says throughout the Bible that **peaceful, cooperative human society is pleasing to him**. Orderly communities are good! Yet human authority in the past has opposed the life-giving presence of God. For example, Acts 5:30 tells that Christ was hanged on a tree by duly constituted authority.

Just like Peter and the apostles in our text, when we follow Christ, sometimes we are forced to choose between quiet, law-abiding lives and stepping out in faith to do we believe God wants. Although respect for community leadership is valued, **our highest value is respect for God**.

Christ's exaltation as Leader and Savior to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins takes precedence over any human authority (v.33). We must witness to these things even when told to be silent (v.33), even if we are afraid and uncertain.

**Our focus is on knowing and honoring what God says.** Any disobedience to earthly authority is a byproduct of that, not the goal. So this is our lifelong quest, to know what God loves and requires.

**When people disobey human laws in obedience to a higher principle, we call it civil disobedience.** Civil disobedience is not with malice, for profit or advantage. Civil disobedience is for a purpose, and can give an account of what that purpose is. Civil disobedience counts the cost and takes the consequences of not following the law, sometimes to death.

This happened during the **Civil Rights movement**, when jails were packed with young people singing. They had broken Jim Crow laws by sitting at a lunch counter or riding a bus together where the races were commanded to be separate by human laws.

We honor the courageous people of the Civil Rights Movement. It is our responsibility to **consider what the challenges of our own day are** to God's laws.

Generally, Christians are law-abiding and peaceful. **When God's laws are being broken**, with agonizing prayer and discernment together by the community of faith, **Christians follow God's laws and suffer violence, imprisonment or death from human authority**.

We love and trust our human leaders, and it is a mysterious thing to see **peaceful and truthful people met with overwhelming rage and violence**, as in the arrest, trial and crucifixion of Christ. The drive to power and control burns like the very fire of hell in human leaders who do not fear God.

Within the western Christian church since the Reformation, **the Anabaptist communities have functioned as a sort of conscience for the mainstream**, let's get ahead in life, Christian communities. They were hated and persecuted violently by both the Roman Catholic hierarchy and the Reformers, because **they did not feel bound by human authority, but tried to obey only God**. They were willing to suffer in order to live by their conscience. They lived a little apart from society, trying to be faithful Christians, and even today put that space between themselves and the world.

**“Ana”** in Latin, from the Greek, means **“again.”** At a time when everyone was baptized to show your citizenship, which included membership in the Roman Catholic church, they believed that the Bible taught that baptism was for a person old enough to have faith and choose their way. They sought baptism again, “ana”, as adults, which was against the law. It was against the law to read the Bible and interpret it for yourself, as you were expected to defer to the judgments of the leaders of the church and government. Anabaptists did not recognize earthly authority over their faith and did not participate in religious ceremonies sponsored by rulers to exercise their rule. **By being baptized again as an adult, you revealed that you had access to the Bible and were thinking for yourself directly about what God wanted, breaking the law.**

I'd like to end with the **story of Menno Simons** from a special issue of the magazine, Anabaptist World, commemorating the 500<sup>th</sup> year of Anabaptism.

“Fugitive Evangelist,” by John Longhurst. (The story of Menno Simons)  
p. 11, January, 2025 Anabaptist World Magazine.

### **SUGGESTED READING**

Two copies of the special “500 Years of Anabaptism” issue of Anabaptist World Magazine are available for loan upon request to Linda E in the office or Mary Zambrana.