“The Cost of Truth” – Pr Jim Sprengle
Easter 5 – May 2, 2026

I. **Acts 7:56-58** – 56And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” 57But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. 58Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him.

II. **I wonder if we misunderstand the cost of being a Christian**.

a. Soren Kierkegaard, the theologian and philosopher, once wrote, “When one preaches Christianity in such a way that the [response is], ‘Away with that man, he does not deserve to live,’ know that this is the Christianity of the New Testament. Capital punishment is the penalty for preaching Christianity as it truly is.”[1]

b. Our modern form of Christianity in America seems to be more about attracting people to things like peace, hope, love, and all kinds of other nice things… when the Bible presents our faith in Jesus as providing these gifts <u>in spite of</u> the physical world that is full of trouble and brokenness…

   i. In fact, we are taking up our crosses, suffering for doing good, and facing persecution for the faith we openly share with others… and God promises life, as Jesus says in our Gospel, “a place” beyond the trials of our earthly journey.

   ii. Somewhere along the line… perhaps it was with the Roman government making Christianity the main religion of the Empire… the message of Jesus and Him crucified and resurrected became less offensive and more mainstream.

   iii. In Scandinavian countries, people essentially become Lutherans at birth, but the Church and the Bible are considered an ancient tradition that has little bearing on the modern day… and very few attend a church… they are more like museums than places of worship.

c. Our idea of success is something like a mega church where thousands of people are attending services… learning how to live a better life in America… how to feel good about themselves and avoid suffering.

   i. Isn’t it strange how the two stories of Peter and Stephen play out?

   ii. First, you have Peter, who steps up on the Day of Pentecost (which we will read in a couple of weeks), and shares a pointed message of Jesus’ betrayal and death at the hands of the crowd he’s preaching to… and what happens?

      1. They were cut to the heart and they repented and were baptized… some 3000 in number… we definitely see that as success!

   iii. Then you have Stephen, a man who was a deacon, chosen to support the ministry of the Apostles.

1. He steps up and gives a very similar message to the one Peter gave… speaking of Jesus' betrayal and murder at the hands of the people… and what happens?
    a. They were enraged and ground their teeth, and finally they were so angry they dragged Stephen outside the city and stoned him to death… and do we see that as a success story?

d. The story of Stephen shows us that the message of Christianity is not self-help, a guide for living, or promoting the best you can be… but it is a message that might get you seriously injured… or even killed...

III. **We don't face the same persecution** as many other countries in the world.

a. Voice of the Martyrs is a Christian group that supports people all over the world who face persecution for their faith in Christ.
    i. I have attended a couple of their world conferences, which are held every two years in Oklahoma.
    ii. I was really shocked by the people who spoke about their horrific experiences living in countries like China, Colombia, Cuba, Myanmar, Malaysia, Vietnam, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, India, and many countries throughout the continent of Africa and throughout the Middle East.
    iii. The stories are heartbreaking, as they were jailed, beaten, tortured, and family members murdered for their faith in Jesus…

b. I read an article on Friday this past week about a nun who was attacked in the city of Jerusalem, and it had a number of interesting facts:
    i. It said that Christianity is the most persecuted faith in the world, that one in seven Christians face violence, and that 5000 Christians were killed for their faith last year (2025).[2]
    ii. Unfortunately, the news coverage is not showing us the suffering of our brothers and sisters in Christ in other countries as they share Him…

c. You might be thinking that you are blessed to live in a country where Christianity is widely accepted – and people are even being more open about their Christian faith as professional athletes, actors, and prominent people are openly talking about it.
    i. However, it becomes clear that even for these people, a line cannot be crossed… as you may have seen the Chicago Bulls basketball player who was waived after he criticized the NBA for celebrating gay pride.
    ii. Jaden Ivey regularly spoke about his faith to other players, along with his own deliverance from sin and brokenness… and after he was released from the Bulls, he was seen street preaching in Chicago.

d. Again, most of us won't face persecution like they do in countries like China, North Korea, or Afghanistan… but we are socially rejected when we teach about the Bible as though it were true.

i. If you talk about Scripture as the truth, people often reject that kind of Christianity… because they are used to other church bodies teaching a corrupted version of the Scriptures… that's only about love and celebrates the sins that are condemned.
ii. You see men and women in clerical collars waving gay pride flags and marching along celebrating… or pastors preaching that the Bible is not inspired and inerrant, and even questioning Jesus' divinity or His resurrection from the dead…
iii. This is the kind of Christianity that seems acceptable to a large portion of society today – but they don't want to hear solid, biblical teaching that says things like, "Jesus is the only way to heaven…" or, "God has high standards for sexual intimacy, and it's only acceptable in a marriage of one man and one woman…" or "God doesn't necessarily care about your happiness, but He cares about your obedience."

e. Now, will those statements get you killed? Not likely, but they are the kinds of things that create hostility, social distancing (not the Covid kind), and people rejecting you for being a Christian "extremist" or fanatic.

IV. **Yet, what does Jesus say**?

a. Trust in Me… I have prepared a place for you… I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life…
b. He steps into the moment of Stephen's calling the people to repent… and even when they were rejecting Jesus and His message by murdering Stephen… the heavens were opened to him to see that Jesus is in all authority!
c. Stephen could even see the people smashing him with stones through the blood of Jesus, as he pleads for them to God, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." (v. 60)
    i. You see, even in the darkest, most difficult times we experience in our walk of faith, Jesus promises to be there for us – to give us help and sustain us through it all.
d. We are constantly fed by the Word of God, His Holy Supper, and encouraged by the priesthood of all believers so that we can live our lives in boldness and courage… in a lost and dying world.
    i. The Lord died and rose again for our salvation, and all throughout the passion account, we see where His own disciples failed Him and wouldn't stand up because they were afraid.
    ii. But Jesus forgives… just as He restored Peter for denying Him three times… just as He came in peace to all the disciples after He rose… and that same forgiveness is ours.
e. For all the times we lack courage to share a simple message of Jesus as the Way, the Truth, and the Life… He forgives us.

f. For protecting our well-being and reputation over standing up for Jesus… He forgives us.
g. For seeking happiness over taking up our crosses for Christ… He forgives us… and restores us to a life that is willing to change and follow Him.
h. Whatever the Truth may cost in our lives, He will always make it worth it in the end. Amen.

[1] Source: Soren Kierkegaard, "The Echo Answers," in Provocations: The Spiritual Writings of Kierkegaard (Plough, 1999), p. 181

2 Christopher Tremoglie, "Nun attacked in Jerusalem in 'disturbing rise in Christianophobia. 'Where's media coverage," (May 1, 2026), Washington Examiner.