

April 14, 2024
Third Sunday of Easter
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Luke 24:36-49 (Acts 3:11-21; 1 John 3:1-7)

REPENTANCE FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

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

The world sets aside one day to celebrate Easter. They focus on chocolate bunny rabbits, marshmallow peeps, and Easter egg hunts. But the Christian Church celebrates this joyful Eastertide for 50 days, stretching from Easter Sunday to the Day of Pentecost. One day a year is not enough to celebrate the joy of the forgiveness, life, and salvation purchased by our Lord's death and resurrection from the grave. As a matter of fact, every Sunday is in a sense Easter Sunday... a celebration of the resurrection of our Lord. If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. (cf: 1 Corinthians 15:14–17)

“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” (1 Corinthians 15:20)

On that very first Easter Day, the day when Jesus was raised from the dead, St. Luke writes:

“As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, “Peace to you!” (Luke 24:36)

The first thing that comes to mind is – who are these people and what are they talking about? St. John's Gospel tells us that it's Jesus' disciples gathered behind locked doors for fear of the Jews. (cf: John 20:19) No one can come into the room without knocking and being admitted inside. St. Mark's Gospel tells us that the remaining eleven are reclined at the table eating the evening meal. (cf: Mark 16:14)

You can imagine the animated conversation of the disciples talking over one another about the horrific crucifixion three days earlier, and now, the empty tomb. They'd heard the reports. The women didn't find Jesus' body in the tomb but saw a young man dressed in a white robe who told them that Jesus, who was crucified, had risen from the dead. (cf: Mark 16:2–8) Peter and John had also gone to the tomb. They saw that it was empty except for the linen burial cloths. (Luke 24:12; John 20:6–8) And then, there were the two disciples who encountered a stranger on the road to Emmaus. This quirky stranger seemed to know nothing of the dreadful events that had taken place in Jerusalem over the past three days. The two poured out their hearts to the stranger – and then the stranger:

“... beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, ...interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” (Luke 24:23–27)

Arriving in Emmaus, they invited the stranger to spend the night. As they reclined to eat Jesus: ***“... took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. ³¹ And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight.”*** (Luke 24:30–31)

After this, the Emmaus two immediately hustled their way back the 7 miles to Jerusalem, joined the others behind locked doors, and told of their encounter with Jesus. ***“As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them...”*** His appearance in the locked room was just as unexpected as His departure from the Emmaus meal. Although He speaks His word of peace upon them, they’re startled and frightened and think they’re seeing a ghost because – everyone knows that humans cannot magically show up inside rooms with walls and locked doors.

In His resurrected and glorified state, Jesus is no longer bound to natural laws of time and space, like the rock walls of the tomb, or the walls and locked door where the disciples were gathering. He appears whenever and wherever He desires. So, of course the disciples were startled and frightened. Even after seeing Jesus’ hands and feet in flesh and bone, Luke says the disciples: ***“...still disbelieved for joy and were marveling...”*** (Luke 24:41)

It’s easy to relate to this emotion... disbelieving for joy. If any one of us suddenly saw a deceased loved one alive and back from the dead, we’d also experience disbelief and joy. We’d think that it’s too good to be true. How can it be that your loved one who once was dead is now among the living? But at the same time, it’s a joy that they are once again with us.

To prove that He was not Casper the friendly ghost in disguise, Jesus eats a piece of broiled fish in front of them to show them that His body is just like their bodies, with flesh and bones. It’s the very same body that was nailed to the cross, died, and was buried. After providing His evidence, Jesus repeats what he had done for the two Emmaus disciples saying:

“These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.’ ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷ and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.’” (Luke 24:44–47)

Jesus is saying that the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms – what we call the Old Testament – is all about Him. It all points forward to His work of redemption of the world. And when He says: ***“while I was still with you,”*** He’s saying that He is the historical Jesus who took on the flesh of man and dwelt among His people prior to His crucifixion and death – but after fulfilling all that was necessary to defeat sin, death, and the grave – He is the risen Christ. He is risen in glory. He is risen with the Father’s approval of His work of salvation for you and all mankind. And now, the Good News of salvation in Christ, which is the:

“... repentance for the forgiveness of sins [must] be proclaimed in [Jesus’] name to all [people] beginning from Jerusalem.” (Luke 24:47)

We see that happening in our first reading. St. Peter had just healed a lame beggar outside the temple in Jerusalem. (cf: Acts 3:1–10) Everyone who saw the man walking, praised God. They recognized him as the lame beggar and were filled with wonder and amazement. But Peter proclaims to the crowd that it is by faith in Christ Jesus that this man is healed. (cf: Acts 3:16) Peter says that all their ancestral fathers and prophets had pointed to Jesus as the Christ. Following Jesus’ command he says:

“¹⁹ Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, ²⁰ that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord...” (Acts 3:19–20)

In our epistle reading St. John reminds the Christians across Asia Minor that Christ:

“... appeared in order to take away sins...” (1 John 3:5)

He says that all who call themselves Christian should stop the practice of sinning and instead, practice righteousness. (cf: 1 John 3:7–10) And that goes for you and me all people. Just like the Emmaus disciples and the eleven hiding behind locked doors, God alone can open your mind to the Scriptures. He alone can draw you to repentance, create and sustain true faith, and forgive your sins. And that’s what He does among us here in the holy ark of His Church today and whenever two or three are gathered in His Name. (cf: Matthew 18:20)

John writes:

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.” (1 John 3:1)

[point to the crucifix] This is the kind of love the Father has for you. While you were still a sinner, Christ died for you. (cf: Romans 5:8) Despite all your selfishness and sinfulness, regardless of your age, God has adopted you and called you His own child in the waters of Baptism. And so you are His child! You’re His child born through the water and the Word. Born again to a new life as you are joined to the death and resurrection of Christ. Through water and the Spirit, your mind is opened and filled with the truth of the risen Christ.

And it’s not a one-time event. It’s a daily repentance and drowning of your old Adam, then arising as a new creation to live in faith. God made you promises at the font. His Law calls you to contrition and repentance, and baptismal waters wash out all the filth, falsehood, and fear that this broken and evil world pours in and demands you celebrate. He then fills you with the truth and love of Christ crucified, forgiving you of your sins.

Just as Christ came to the Emmaus disciples on the road and to the eleven behind locked doors, He comes to you in this place to open your mind to understand the Scriptures. He comes to you here in the proclamation of repentance for the forgiveness of sins in His Name. He comes to you in His Word of absolution and remembrance of your baptismal promises. He comes to you as you recline at the altar where He feeds you His body and blood to keep you in body and soul unto life everlasting.

God always acts first. He pours out on you His gifts... grace upon grace – and then the Holy Spirit empowers you to respond, enabling you to repent and turn away all your lawlessness. (cf: Acts 3:19; 1 John 3:4) It's one thing to fall into temptation, regret your sin, and receive your Lord's forgiveness; however, it's quite another thing to continue willfully practicing unrepentant sin. In doing so you make a mockery of Christ's sacrificial death for you. The Spirit strengthens you to flee all your unrighteousness and to share the redeeming love of Christ crucified with others, to love as you have been loved, to forgive as you have been forgiven.

[point at the crucifix] This is the kind of love the Father has given for you, that you should be called children of God – and so you are. He has spared no expense to pay the debt for your sin. He sent His only Son to die on a cross in judgment for you. He paid the penalty you owe and suffered the wrath you deserve through the sacrifice of His own body and blood on the cross for you. And God has accepted that sacrifice. It is finished. It is sufficient. There's no more payment to be made. Jesus, who was dead, is alive because all your sin has been accounted for.

Dear Christian, the resurrection of Jesus is the firstfruits of your resurrection on the Last Day. He who was dead is alive. Repent of your sin before God and know that He has forgiven you. Live in the joy of the Gospel. Repent of your sin before one another and strive to live a God pleasing life. Give forgiveness freely as you have been forgiven. Live in the peace of a restored relationship with God the Father and with one another.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.