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## The Third Sunday of Easter

April 14, 2024

### The Risen Christ Gives Us a Message to Proclaim

In the evening hours of Easter Sunday, the apostles were confused and afraid. Could they believe the reports that Jesus had come back to life? Could they envision that they would be walking with him again? All at once Jesus appeared: "Peace be with you." Their fear soon melted. It soon became clear that they would not be walking with Jesus for long. He had an assignment for them: to be his witnesses in the world. That assignment is still ours today. The resurrection of Jesus brings peace to our lives and a purpose for living. He gives us a message to proclaim.

#### Sermon Acts 3:3-11

**While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.**

**"Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus.**

Introduction – Exactly what is the Christian message that we share with people? What do we tell our friends when they ask us about religion? What is the message we support with our offerings and gifts? I know those questions might sound silly to you: the message we know and share and support is what the Bible says. But they aren't silly questions, not these days. There are all kinds of people getting on board the Bible these days and the messages they're sharing and supporting aren't even close to what we hear in church and learned in catechism class. The trouble is those messages are all around us; they're on TV and in newspapers and on the internet. Some of those messages include ideas we agree with; we agree that abortion and homosexuality are wrong and so we listen more closely. That's when we can be fooled. We hear a lot about Judeo-Christian ethics but do followers of Jesus have the same ideas about pleasing God as people who reject Jesus? Evangelicals are the most vocal religious group in America but they deny infant baptism and the Real Presence in Communion and insist that people must decide to believe before they can be saved. And then there are the so-called Christian Nationalists who connect our nation's man-made constitution with the Spirit-inspired Scriptures and suggest

that being an American means being a Christian. It can get confusing and it's hard to know sometimes what Christian message we want to share and support.

When Jesus appeared to his disciples on Easter evening—when he proved that he wasn't a ghost and showed them his crucifixion wounds—he gave them the message he wanted them to share. We heard what he said in the Gospel for today: **Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."** 40 days later Jesus ascended and ten days after that he sent the Holy Spirit to empower them. What did they do? They shared the message Jesus taught them. Luke tells us: **The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.**

In the First Reading for this morning we hear that message coming from the Peter. He shared the message with a large group of people who came running to hear him after he healed a crippled beggar. We're within days or weeks of Pentecost here so the message is as pure and basic as can be. Peter's message helps us to see through haze and sift through the rubble and **sort** out the garbage we hear so often these days. And it reminds us that

### **We Have One Message to Share**

With Christ as the core...With the law that crushes...With the gospel that compels

1. Those first Christians didn't have churches to go to; the temple was close and they were used to going there. Peter and John were heading for the afternoon prayer service when they encountered a cripple who was begging for money. **Silver and gold I do not have, Peter said, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.** And that's what the beggar did and he jumped up and down too and he shouted for joy to God. Of course that attracted all kinds of attention. **All the people were astounded and came running** to Peter and John and the beggar. And that's when Peter started to share. **Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus.** The message was exactly what Jesus had told them to share. Peter took them back to their roots and to what was written in their Old Testament Bibles about the coming Messiah: the suffering servant, the blood of the lamb, the Holy and Righteous One, the Redeemer who lives, the light of the Gentiles. **We are witness of this, Peter said.** We didn't heal this beggar. Because we put our faith **in the name of Jesus this man whom you see and know was made strong,** And then he said it again: **It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him** which we have **that has completely healed him, as you can all see.** Nothing about the beggar here; nothing about Peter; nothing about John. There was one message to share and it had Christ at the core.

Among the most horrible lies that Satan has invented in his attack against Christ and the Christian message is that the Savior's kingdom is an earthly kingdom. Jesus told Pilate, **My kingdom is not of this world** and he said to the Pharisees, **The kingdom of God is not something that can be observed because the kingdom of God is within you.** Not everyone heard that truth; too many believed Satan's lie. Roman emperors believed it, the papacy bought in, the Protestant reformers accepted it, and the Puritans in New England lived by it. The Spanish didn't come to America just to convert the natives; they came to America claim the natives' land for Spain. Satan's lie about Jesus' kingdom turns the message upside down. Jesus didn't come to our world to overthrow Rome but to conquer sin and he did that on a cross, not with a mob. He didn't come to punish sinners but to save them. He didn't come to one nation but to **every nation, tribe, language, and people.** He doesn't change people with decisions for Christ or blaring rock bands but with the gentle quiet whisper of the gospel. The Christian message has Christ as its core: **For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.** That's the message that saved me and it's the message that saved you and that's the one message we share.

2. Don't think that Peter's message was all peace and joy. He had to hit these Jews hard and he did exactly that. **You handed Jesus over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the**

**author of life.** Not the way to win friends and influence people. But Peter wasn't trying to convince these people; he was working to convict them. He was forcing them to face up to what they had done: they had rejected and disowned and killed the Messiah God had been promising them for centuries. The message needed to force their tears and break their pride and drive them to their knees. The message needed to lead them to admit that they deserved judgment and death and hell. Peter wasn't trying to control people with the law. The law he preached intended to crush them.

Despite what some people think, God's law is not a book of rules. God's law is the statement of his will. God's law doesn't suggest that we do better; God's law demands that we be perfect. The Christian message isn't about reforming people; it's about emptying people of their pride and their wisdom and their hope. The message we share must insist that **the soul that sins shall die.** When we share that message we don't thunder it or lightening it; we say it quietly and lovingly but we say it clearly and concisely. And we say it to lead people to admit: "If this is true, then I am lost." The law must break down before the gospel can build up. The law must crush so that the gospel can create. That's the one message we share.

3. When Jesus came to earth he called sin a sin, but he called sin a sin because he wanted to save souls. Jesus didn't outlaw prostitution; he told a prostitute **Your sins are forgiven.** He didn't throw financial cheats in jail; he said **Follow me.** He didn't condemn the killer who hung next to him; he said **Today you will be with me in Paradise.** The message Jesus shared was so clear and so soothing and so full of hope that people believed in him and changed their ways. The message Jesus shared was good news; we call the good news gospel and the gospel compelled people to faith. That's the message Peter shared: **Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus.** Luke tells us that **many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.**

There is plenty wrong in our society today; we see it and hear about it every day. Jesus warned us about it; the early Christians endured it, and John envisioned it in his Revelation. The day will come when all people will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and countless sinners will hear his voice: **Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.** But that is his responsibility, not ours. The message Jesus gives us to share does not mean to restore a changing culture or reform a sinful society or reclaim a lost heritage. We have one message to share; we heard it from John who stood next to Peter and the beggar: **if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.** Don't be fooled by Satan's lies. Trust in Jesus' truth. And share the message. Amen.

*The sermon was preached by Pastor James Tiefel.*