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The Third Sunday of Easter

April 18, 2021

The Essential Message of the Risen Christ: Repent and Believe!

The resurrection of Jesus places a great exclamation point on Good Friday. Jesus defeated Satan and sin on the cross; by coming back to life he proved his victory and assures us of ours. Sin and grace, repentance and forgiveness are the Savior's message before Easter and ever since. Jesus calls us to repent of our sins and find forgiveness in him. The same message we believe is the message we take to the world.

First Reading

Acts 3:11-20

Peter urges: Repent and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out.

Second Reading

1 John 1:5-2:2

Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Gospel

Luke 24:36-49

Easter proclaims repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

Live Each Day with Easter

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, 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 (1 John 1:5 – 2:2).

Introduction – I'm glad Easter sticks around for a while. We've tossed the Easter lilies at our house and there's nothing left of the Easter ham except the hambone, but Easter is still here in church. The Easter whites are still here, the Easter hymns are still here, and we're still saying "Christ Is arisen! He is risen indeed." We have Easter for four more Sundays and then finally white turns to Red for Pentecost and then we're in the green season until the snow flies.

The truth is that Easter sticks around longer than that. Martin Luther said one time that every Sunday is a little Easter. We talk about the resurrection every Sunday, don't we. We're singing to Jesus when we sing "For you only are holy; you only are the Lord." We don't sing, "You only were holy; you only were the Lord." We're talking about Jesus when we say, "who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit." Not past tense—lived and reigned—present tense—lives and reigns. Everything in our past, present, and future, everything from dawn to dusk and everything from dusk to dawn is connected to Easter because everything in our lives is connected to Jesus who is, thank you very much, very much alive.

So how do we keep Easter going when the lilies are gone? How do we celebrate Easter when the grass needs to be mowed and the flowers need to be planted? Or when we're looking for a job because we don't have a job? Or when we need a lawyer or a doctor? Or when our knees hurt or our heart aches? How do we make Easter practical? How can we make Easter concrete?

Well, we can start by listening to St. John. He was actually there on Easter Sunday. He saw the empty tomb, he saw the risen Jesus, and he heard what Jesus said. He was there when Jesus spoke the words we heard in the Gospel this morning: **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.** Say it again, John, What will be preached to all nations? **Repentance for the forgiveness of sins.** That's right. With those words in his memory bank, John speaks to us this morning in the Second Reading and tells us how to make Easter practical. He means to say:

Live Each Day with Easter
Understanding the reality of God
Confessing the reality of sin
Trusting in the reality of Christ

1. This is the message we heard from him (from Jesus) and declare to you. OK. Let's hear the message, John. **God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.** Jesus did say that, many times. He called God perfect and the greatest of all. John could have written that God is truth or God is good or God is faithful and it comes out the same. The point is that in God there is no darkness, there are no lies, and there is no evil. God doesn't make mistakes; he doesn't slip up; he doesn't let down his guard; he doesn't forget. God's name is the Lord which means I AM.

When we understand the reality of God, we've taken the first step in living each day with Easter. And this is a challenge for us sometimes. A lot of people, probably most people, and maybe even some people you know, have pretty fuzzy ideas about God. There are no atheists in foxholes, they say, but there are plenty of cynics and skeptics and they live and work where you do. They wear off on us sometimes and we catch ourselves thinking of God as the Force instead of the Lord. God becomes Uncle God or Grandpa God who naps in his heavenly recliner and watches us with just one eye open. No, John says. God is not an indefinable force or a disinterested idea. **God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.** This is the baseline. This is where John starts and this is where we start.

2. The blessing of Easter is that we have fellowship with God. We are connected to God like two links on a steel chain. We live in God's house and we share God's meals. We walk with him and talk with him. But there's reality here that John knows: **If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth.** If God is light and truth, if he is perfect and faithful and we're darkness and liars and evil and unfaithful, we can't connect to God. If we won't see God as he is, if we tell lies about who he is, if we are not as perfect as he is, if we are not faithful like he is, we can't live in God's house. We can convince ourselves we're doing OK. We come to church, we volunteer, we give our offerings. But if we are not light and truth and good and faithful like God is, we're fooling ourselves. We are living a lie. We're hanging on to a delusion. There is only one way to have fellowship with God. John wrote: **If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another.** When we walk in the light of God, we are connected to everyone who walks in the light of God and we become the light of the world because we walk in the light of God.

This is where Easter becomes practical. We don't walk in the light, we know that, not by our birth and not by our actions. I'm not going to make a list of sins here. You don't have to be a brain surgeon to see your own sins. That's why Jesus came. Jesus died to show us God's love, but Jesus bled to show us God's justice. The God who is light, in whom there is not darkness at all, demanded payment to bring us from darkness to light. And so, St. John tells us, **the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.**

This is the second step in living each day with Easter: confessing the reality of sin. Listen to John: **If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.** He repeats himself to make the point: **If we claim we have not sinned, we make God out to be a liar and his word is not in us.** Failure to admit our sins isn't just dumb, it also damning. If we convince ourselves that we are light and truth and good and faithful, if we have no sins to admit or confess, who needs Jesus? Who needs Easter? If we refuse to confess the reality of sin, we will never look to Jesus. And without Jesus we are damned. If you want to know why people reject Jesus, look here. If you want to know why some church members forsake Jesus, look here again. And if you want to know what can keep you from living each day with Easter, well, look here again. We lose the blessing of Easter if we refuse to confess the reality of sin.

3. When Jesus met with his apostles during the days after Easter, he focused on his most important message and that truth became the main message of the Christian religion. John remembered that **Jesus breathed on the disciples** and authorized them to **forgive sins**. Luke remembered Jesus saying that **repentance for the forgiveness of sins must be preached to all nations**. It is exactly where Easter becomes most practical. John nailed this theme when he wrote in this letter: **If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, 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.**

Here is the third step in living each day with Easter: trusting in the reality of Christ. The reality is that sin makes life hard and unhappy. I don't know if this happens to you, but do you ever think back and remember something you said or did that was so lousy that it still makes you shudder? Do you ever think about sins that probably are going to affect you right now and maybe even in the future—sins that may disqualify you from a job or break a relationship or impact your health? Do you ever wonder if God can forgive you for this sin or that sin?

Easter means that Jesus Christ forgives our sins, all of them. Easter means that Jesus presents us to God right now as pure people and righteous people and not as what we really are. Easter means that Jesus stands at the right hand of God and defends us by pointing to his work for us instead of our sin in us. Easter means that the sacrifice he made on the cross brings us into fellowship with God. We are at one with God: the steel chain is tight, the house of God is open, the walk and the talk with God happen every day. Jesus did this for everyone and he did it for you.

The pageantry and beauty of Easter will be gone soon, but for us Easter never ends. We live with Easter each day as we understand the reality of God, as we confess the reality of sin and as we trust in the reality of Christ. Happy Easter! Amen.