

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in the name of our Risen Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ! Today's sermon is based on the First Reading appointed for today, the Second Sunday of Easter. Let us pray... Amen.

Just last Sunday we celebrated Christ's victory over death and the grave in His Resurrection. Christ is risen. Our Gospel reading records the events of that first Easter evening, when Christ came and found His disciples hiding behind locked doors out of fear of the Jews and proclaimed His peace. There Jesus removed all doubt of what had just happened over the past 12 hours by showing that in fact He had physically and truly risen from the dead. He also breathed on the ten men present, giving them the Holy Spirit, and effectively established the office of the Holy Ministry. Jesus sent this group of men, along with Thomas, as His spokesmen to proclaim repentance and the forgiveness of sins in His name. This office and proclamation continues through the called and ordained men who hold the pastoral office today in the Holy Christian Church. They are not there to proclaim themselves or their greatness, but the Law and Gospel--the repentance and forgiveness of sins from the One who called and sends them.

And now, in our first reading today, we hear of the apostles preaching and teaching in Jerusalem shortly after Jesus' resurrection and ascension. It was this same group of men, who only a short while before had fled at Jesus' arrest and were in hiding from the world from Jesus' crucifixion till after His resurrection, all the while cowering from the Jewish authorities. Now here they are proclaiming Christ and Him crucified, and even more so, Christ risen from the dead! This same group of cowards in the face of arrest were now proclaiming the good news in broad daylight, in the Jerusalem Temple, and in full view of those same religious leaders who had Jesus executed and whom they were so desperately hiding from just weeks previous.

Yet here they are, in the same Temple Jesus was teaching in during the week before He died. People came from all over the area to hear them and the message they were proclaiming. People were bringing the sick to hear the good news of the risen Lord, and all with any infirmity or affliction were healed. The apostles' proclaimed the wonderful message of redemption through the crucified and risen Lord; the same message they had been proclaiming since the day of Pentecost. The greatest gift to all who heard and believed was the forgiveness of sins.

The apostles were following Jesus' final instructions given before His ascension as recorded in the Gospel of Luke: Jesus told the disciples; "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 Jesus 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 and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."(Lk 24:44-49)

These men were witnesses of Christ's life, death, and resurrection, and since the day of Pentecost they were 'clothed with power from on high'. The apostles were proclaiming Christ's message of Repentance and the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name. They knew the only way to be saved was through Christ as He had told them saying: "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no

one comes to the Father except through me.”(John 14:6) Peter knew it. So did John, James, Andrew, Matthew, Thomas, Bartholomew, Philip, Thaddaeus, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Cananaean or Zealot, and the newly added apostle to replace Judas, Matthias. They knew there was salvation in no one else and they knew it because the One who told them is faithful and really did rise from the dead by the glory of the Father. They knew the good news and nothing under heaven, except death, would now stop them.

Jesus' death destroyed the power of death and He gives eternal life to all who believe and trust in Him.

What better news could there ever be, your eternal salvation is sealed in the physical resurrection of Christ our Lord and God from the dead. This is why the apostles went out and shared this Gospel—Our crucified Lord and Saviour ROSE just as He said He would! And because Jesus rose, we too will share in His resurrection to eternal life with all who have God-given faith in Christ when He returns in glory. Though this body will die, well unless Christ returns first, it will not stay dead. On the Last Day, when Jesus returns, He will raise these bones, He will restore this body, and every body asleep in the ground. Even the risk of arrest, public mocking, ridicule, imprisonment, beatings, and death cannot take this promise away, nor can it stop its proclamation. Why? Because on the Last Day all people will share in the resurrection from the dead: Those in faith to everlasting life with God; those without faith to everlasting condemnation.

The Jewish authorities did not like this proclamation. They tried repeatedly to silence the apostles. Just after our text today, Luke records how “. . . the high priest questioned them, 28 saying, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” 29 But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. 30 The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. 31 God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. 32 And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”(Acts 5:27-32)

This wasn’t the first time Peter and the apostles had been arrested by the High Priest and the Sadducees. The last time was after they healed a crippled man. That time Peter answered the charges by saying, “Rulers of the people and elders, 9 if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, 10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. 11 This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. 12 And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:8b-12)

To try to stop Peter and the rest of the apostles from speaking about Jesus and His resurrection, the High Priest "called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John answered them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, 20 for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”(Acts 4:18-20)

And that is exactly what they did. The apostles didn't hide, they didn't cower at the threat of persecution or even violent death. Instead, and thank God, they proclaimed God's message of repentance and the forgiveness of sins to all the world. Those men, those first preachers of God's Word proclaimed the Law which cut their hearers to the core. Hearing of how their sinful actions caused our Lord and Saviour to be crucified and die on that God forsaken tree. But Jesus death was not just someone else's fault. You and I are just as much, if not more responsible for Jesus' brutal crucifixion and violent death. But Jesus death is not the end. Christ is risen, and because He is risen faithful pastors are able to proclaim with Peter and the other apostles the wonderful Gospel to those crushed by the Law. "And Peter said to them, 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.'"(Acts 2:38-39)

We continue to stand on the "foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone"(Eph 2:20) sharing and proclaiming this good news of our salvation found only in Christ and because of Christ this and every Sunday. Again this morning we were witnesses of God at work through water and His Word this morning with Katelyn. Here God continued faithfully in His promise of delivering faith, forgiveness, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life through the washing of water with His Word, as He has with each of us.

There is nothing greater or more powerful in all of creation than God's Word of the Gospel. It is life and salvation. Through God's revealed Word of Scripture and in His Sacraments the Holy Spirit is living and active and "His Word does not return to Him empty, but it accomplishes that which He purposes, and does succeed in the thing for which He sends it to do."(Is 55:11) That Word has come in the flesh, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We remembered His resurrection just a week ago on Easter Sunday. There from the tomb Christ rose proclaiming His payment for our sins accepted and His victory complete over sin, death, and the devil for us. We will still have challenges and difficulties in this life, but we also have the sure guarantee of salvation and eternal life in our risen Lord.

In these days following Easter-the Resurrection of the Lord-rejoice in Christ and your salvation. Following in the footsteps of those who have gone before you, joyfully and boldly share these words of good news with all around you. There are some who have not heard the good news and who desperately need to heard, Christ is risen; He is Lord; and because He lives all who have faith in Him will share in His present promises and eternal salvation. Alleluia. Amen.