

The grace, mercy, and peace of Christ Jesus, our risen Lord and Saviour, be yours. The title for today’s sermon is “Preaching repentance and forgiveness in Christ”, based on the Gospel reading from St. Luke, the 24<sup>th</sup> chapter. Let us pray... Amen.

If you ever wondered how significant Christ’s physical resurrection is, just take a look at the lectionary. Two full weeks after celebrating the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour, we are still reading about that first Easter day. The focus has shifted only slightly from solely hearing about Jesus’ resurrection and its eternal importance, to hearing Jesus’ words spoken to His disciples. Today’s Gospel reading recounts Jesus’ words spoken on the evening our Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Jesus began with: **“Peace to you.”**(Luke 24:36) Through His Word Jesus gives exactly what He says: His peace.

While the disciples were scared and confused, Jesus reached out His hands and His feet so they could touch them, and He asked for something to eat to give them peace. Jesus, who had died, now stood among them talk and eating.

Proof of His physical resurrection; check, and of that there is no doubt. Now on to what Jesus resurrection means for them, for us, and for all people. Peace with Jesus. Peace with God in Christ Jesus.

So Jesus continued by pointing them to holy Scripture and His teachings by 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.”**(Luke 24:44) For all of the Old Testament pointed ahead to Jesus, the promise of His forgiveness, and His work to reconcile us back to God because of our sinfulness.

I once read that reading the Old Testament without seeing Jesus is like watching Star Wars for the first time on mute. One can see the things going on, but would have no idea of why everything was happening. This is how the disciples saw Jesus and how they understood the Old Testament prophecies regarding the Christ.

But Jesus, the Word made flesh, was not content to leave them in the silence, so on that Easter night Jesus, metaphorically, turned on the volume.

Luke records: **“Then *Jesus* opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,<sup>46</sup> and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,<sup>47</sup> and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.<sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things.<sup>49</sup> 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.”**(Luke 24:45-49)

Not only does Jesus remind them of what He said, He also opened their minds to understand all of Scripture. (*Hands: Pow*) There’s blowing someone’s mind by telling or

showing them something amazing, then there’s blowing someone’s mind how Jesus did. He not only reminds them of all He told them and what they’d seen and were seeing, but then He also opened their minds to understand God’s plan for our salvation, recorded in holy Scripture from the beginning of creation. Additionally they were brought to realize the God of heaven and earth had taken on our human flesh and bones and had been walking, eating, and teaching them for the past three years. This Jesus is the One who died and rose, but what’s more, He is God, Jesus is the Author of Life and who was raised from the dead **“because it was not possible for him to be held by death.”**(Acts 2:24). Jesus is alive and He will never, ever, die again.

But that’s not the end. Now the disciples, along with all believers, are given the divine privilege to share the Good News of Jesus death and resurrection with all people. Jesus explained to the disciples **“that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations”**(Luke 24:47), and that is exactly what they did, even at the cost of their own lives and livelihoods. Because of this same proclamation you are here today.

Preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins in Christ’s name. Jesus’ call is really that simple. Some say too simple. But, the preaching of repentance and the forgiveness of sins in Christ’s name, and only in Christ’s name, is the foundation, and only foundation, for Christ-centered preaching.

***Peter*** didn’t preach any 12 step programs to be happier in your marriage, or how to get ahead in this life. Peter preached; **“...you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses... Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out”**(Acts 3:15,19).

***John*** didn’t tell people they were ok just as they were and to no worry about their sins, instead John preached **“Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. <sup>5</sup> You know that *Christ* appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. <sup>6</sup> No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. <sup>7</sup> Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. <sup>8</sup> Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.”**(1 John 3:4-8) So, repent, for **“if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. <sup>2</sup> He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”**(1 John 2:1-2)

***Paul*** didn’t sermonize on how to ‘get a better you’, or ‘100 ways to simplify your life’: Paul preached **“Christ and Him crucified”**(1 Corinthians 2:2) **“to save sinners”**(1 Timothy 1:15). Paul warned the Romans saying: **“both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, <sup>10</sup> as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; <sup>11</sup> no one understands; no one seeks for God. <sup>12</sup> All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one....**

**For there is no distinction: <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.”**(Romans 3:9-12, 22-25) So Repent; **“for the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”**(Romans 6:23)

Christ Jesus told His disciples to preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins in His name. But what do we really need to repent of? Are we not all nice, civil, and kind people who try to do good? Isn't it enough that we try to do nice things and try not to sin, at least not too much. What is the real harm if we gossip about our neighbours, if we tell a few 'white lies', if we don't really work as hard at work as our employer expects, if we look at a little X-rated material on the internet, if we drive too fast, or hold a grudge? Why repent and turn away from sins? If no one is getting hurt, who cares?

Because God: the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, cares. When we deny our sins we lie to ourselves and we lie to God. When you make light of your sinful actions, when you deny the severity of sin, and when you refuse to repent and turn away from your sins you are in great danger of rejecting Christ and the Holy Spirit working through God's Word and Sacrament to bring you His forgiveness.

Jesus also cares because He carried all our sins to the cross and died to pay for each one. It was our sins, those 'harmless ones' along with those we consider more serious, which caused Him to be whipped and beaten to an inch of His life. Our sins—those clicks of a mouse, refusal to forgive, or careless words—which caused those spikes to be driven through His hands and feet and which caused our Lord excruciating pain. Our sins—our laziness, our idolatry, adultery, and our lying—caused the Creator of the universe and Author of life to be executed in our place. **“For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.”**(Romans 14:23) Those sins—your sins and mine sins—caused the righteous wrath of God to be poured out in full force on the only truly innocent One, Jesus. Repent and turn and cling to Christ.

When we recognize our sins, they shouldn't mildly bother us: they should terrify us. When we come to see our sins we should be like King David, down on our knees praying: **“<sup>1</sup> Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. <sup>4</sup> Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.”**(Psalm 51:1,4) Yet, **“I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,” and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. *Selah*”**(Psalm 32:5) We can confidently say with the psalmist: **“<sup>3</sup> If you, O LORD, should *keep a record of sins*, O Lord, who could stand? <sup>4</sup> But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.”**(Psalm 130:3-4)

And there is the Good News: the reason we repent of our sins, why we turn and flee from them, is because we know our Saviour and all He has already done for us. We plead with God for mercy since we know Christ Jesus is already interceding for us and pouring out His underserved forgiveness, mercy, and salvation on us through His Word and Sacrament. We pray for help to avoid sin and for forgiveness when we fail.

When in the first reading, Peter preached the Law to the people in the Jerusalem temple, he did not leave the people squirm under the Law. Instead, when they were crushed by the Law, Peter preached the Gospel; **“Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out”**(Acts 3:19). Peter repeats almost the same wording from Pentecost when he preached to other broken and repentant sinners: **“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.”**(Acts 2:38)

For the reason Christ Jesus came into our world was to save sinners (*1 Timothy 1:15*), all of us. **“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”**(John 3:17) **“God has granted repentance that leads to *eternal life*.”**(Acts 11:18) It is the Holy Spirit, working through Word and Sacrament, who guides our repentance and helps us fight against our natural inclination to sin. He turns, and returns us, to life in Christ.

In the forgiveness of Christ, we are refreshed. Through His Word, our sins are blotted out. This is God’s love for us—in Christ, we are called children of God. The very wounds of Jesus confirm His grief, His sacrifice, His death foretold by Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms. Jesus’ resurrected presence with the disciples leaves no room for doubt. He says, **“Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands”**(Isaiah 49:16a) Now repentance and the forgiveness of sins is preached in Jesus’ name, and His forgiveness and salvation is shared boldly with everyone. Repent and rejoice in Christ, His forgiveness, and His salvation. Amen.

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