

The Second Sunday of Easter 4/27/2025

We continue this morning in the season of Easter, celebrating the glorious resurrection of our Lord. In the days after the resurrection Jesus appeared to the disciples and many others in order to prepare them to be his witnesses to the world. The followers of Jesus saw their sorrow turn into amazing joy. Yet in those first days after The Resurrection all of the disciples were not always so quick to believe and respond as we would anticipate.

A short while ago the NCAA basketball tournament came and went. The striking thing about the NCAA tournament is that there are no second chances. A team like Purdue or IU can have much success in the regular season, be ranked with the highest seed in their bracket pool of teams, but then once the tournament starts, all it takes is one bad quarter of play and you can lose a close game to a team that you would typically beat 4 times out of 5. One loss and you are out- no second chances-ever.

Today, though we get a second chance, or more accurately a second round at Easter. Although most of the world has moved on to other things, we celebrate Easter again. Easter itself is all about second chances. The disciples all fled at signs of danger and sought to protect themselves instead of confessing Jesus. But now he appears to them and says: "*Peace be with you!*" You are forgiven, your slate is wiped clean. You are my disciples again and you will have many chances to speak up for me in courage.

Jesus seeks to have us follow him and put our trust in him, no matter how many second chances we require. His delight is to see us turn to Him and be saved. He did not come into the world to condemn the world, but in order that we might be saved by Him.

As our gospel reading starts this morning, Thomas, is not ready to believe the words of the other disciples that they have seen Jesus risen from the dead. He needed a personal encounter with Jesus himself before he could believe. Jesus invited him to put his finger into the hole in his hand from the nails of the cross, he tells Thomas that he can put his hand there in his side where the spear pierced him. Jesus desired for Thomas to stop doubting and believe. And Jesus was willing to ease his doubts with his physical presence and the evidence markers of his wounds from the cross. As we read in *1John That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life.*

Indeed the Son of God was made manifest to us, as the first disciples and followers of Jesus heard him and saw him and touched him, the gift of eternal life and fellowship with God was made known to them.

In response to these assurances offered by Jesus, Thomas believed, it sunk in that Jesus really was risen. He responded in words of worship: *“My Lord and My God”*

Jesus began the encounter with Thomas and the rest of the disciples with words of peace, and after giving the gift of his presence among them they were able to worship Jesus in this peace from there on out.

Like all of the disciples, we let Jesus down again and again. We let him down a third time even, fourth and fifth time. But when the pastor says “I forgive you all of your sins” It’s as sure as if Jesus himself is speaking those words of Absolution. Jesus wants us to have the same peace as he gave Thomas and the rest of the 11. He desires that we have this peace until the time when we are forever united with him in heaven.

Luther’s explanation in the Small Catechism section on Confession describes what Jesus intends for His Church with Confession and absolution. *“What is the Office of the Keys? The Office of the Keys is that special authority which Christ has given to his Church on earth to forgive the sins of repentant sinners, but to withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant as long as they do not repent.”*

The office of the keys is a way in which Jesus communicates to us: “Peace be with you”

How wonderful to hear from our Savior the message: “Peace be with you!” Because of His resurrection, we can actually experience peace as God intended for us. And the Lord gives us the authority as the church to extend this peace of Jesus to others, as the fruit of his crucifixion and resurrection.

As we celebrate and rejoice in the second and third chances Jesus gives to us, we are tasked to share this same forgiveness with others. Jesus does not leave us to be frustrated with inactivity, God’s Word tells us that ‘the harvest is great but the laborers are few.’

When we extend forgiveness to others in the way our Lord designed, when we share the good news of second chances in our Risen Lord, we are offering people the gift of freedom from the paralysis of sin. There is no greater gift we can give to others

than the peace of Jesus. In this way the Church's purpose is not only to report of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus to the world, but to proclaim this message and fulfill this message by baptizing and making disciples of our Risen Lord.

The Resurrection of Jesus is not a message that we leave to the world to decide what they make of it- where some see it is an inspiration for new beginnings in life, or a message of hope in a community of believers that cannot be extinguished.

Instead, it is a message conditioned by the direction of the Holy Spirit, a message that is only fully understood where there is repentance for the forgiveness of sins preached, where there is a message preached with care as to how a person can receive the fruits of the cross and empty tomb of Jesus to the end of saving faith. We share the full meaning of the Resurrection of Jesus when we can share in the context of Word and Sacrament ministry, where there is repentance for the forgiveness of sins preached as the way to properly receive Jesus as our King.

Just like Jesus opened the scriptures to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we are called to share the full story of Christ's Resurrection by telling of how all of the scripture points to Jesus.

We are called to share how King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished to see not three but four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, all unhurt by the fire; and the appearance of the fourth like a son of God. For Christ walks with us through the fire and strains of this world, and yet not a hair on our heads is harmed.

We are called to share the full story of Christ as the fulfillment of the promises made to our Fathers in the faith, the fulfillment of scripture that Christ is the long promised Savior, the Lamb of God who takes away our sins and restores us back to the image of God before the fall into sin.

In Isaiah chapter 29 we hear: And the LORD said: *"Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men, therefore behold, I will again do wonderful things with this people, with wonder upon wonder; and the wisdom of their wise men will perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hidden."*

Indeed, our God responded to the faithlessness and unbelief of our fathers with a New thing, a wonder upon wonders- Jesus' Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection. This foolishness of the cross destroyed all of the wisdom of the wise and still keeps the discerning of human reason blinded from the LORD. Yet to us he has revealed this

mystery hidden for the ages that we might draw our hearts near to Jesus and know him as children know their mothers and fathers from the youngest age.

The Easter Hymn The Day of Resurrection highlights the role of repentance in receiving the gifts of Christ's Resurrection: Stanza 2 reads: Let hearts be purged of evil that we may see aright, The Lord in rays eternal, Of Resurrection light. And listening to his accents, May hear so calm and plain, His own "All hail" and hearing, May raise the victorious strain.

In Come You Faithful Raise the Strain we find another Easter hymn from John of Damascus. Stanza 2 celebrates what Easter means for us who are the people of God: *'Tis the spring of souls today; Christ has burst his prison And from three days sleep in death As a sun has risen; All the winter of our sins, long and dark is flying From His light, to whom is given Laud and praise undying.*

Brothers in Christ, now is the time for hearts to be purged of the evil of our sins so that we may see the brilliant rays of Resurrection light. Now is the time to hear our Risen Lord lead the battle cry for all in His kingdom to raise the song of victory.

Now is the time to experience a Spring of our souls, to live as New creations in Christ, the old has gone, the new has come. His resurrection light sweeps out the winter of our sins with a mighty wind that has Satan violently whisked away out of our sight.

This Resurrection of Jesus is not just a fulfillment of Israel's history, but a fulfillment of the history of all nations. No matter the movements of history of a people, no matter their false idols or false religions, Jesus crucified and risen is the true fulfillment of the story for all peoples and lands.

And here, no matter the history in your life, Jesus' Resurrection is the end goal, it is the chief story of all of our congregations in the LCMS and the chief story of our lives. May the joy of the Resurrection give us all hope and courage to meet the task set before us as His Church, the New Israel, Amen.