

“Think Again”

Text: Acts 3:13-26

Yesterday I was watching the Masters with my son Will, and it occurred to me (while I was watching it) that a man will do anything to spend time with his kids. Actually, much to my surprise, I found myself enjoying it. And as I watched, I found myself wondering how many golfers playing in that tournament second-guessed shots they'd made? How many golfers playing in this weekend's Masters tournament are today thinking again (with regret?) about some of the decisions they made on the golf course?

I mention that because, in today's First Scripture Reading, Peter invites people to think again the decision they made to kill Jesus. Peter's invitation is extended to us as well as he calls us to think again the decisions of our sinful lives. When it comes to how we live life as sinners who are trying to be faithful to Jesus, it

does us good to think again. Let's do that now together ...

As we do, we return to our First Scripture Reading for today where we hear again that Peter once said:

“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, ... You killed the Author of life, but God raised Him from the dead. We are witnesses of this ...” (Acts 3:13-15)

Peter spoke those words to a crowd of people (Jews, in Jerusalem) about to enter the Temple for prayer, and he said to them that it was because of Jesus – the Jesus Who is risen from the dead – that a crippled man stood before them whole and well. You see, today's First Reading leaves out the part about how Peter and John had healed a man who had been lame from

birth, but it was that miracle that had attracted attention to them and had occasioned Peter's second sermon in the book of Acts, the sermon from which we hear in today's text. Peter said in that sermon that it was not by his or John's power that the man was healed, but by the power of Christ, as he says:

“... it is the Name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; ...” (v.16)

Peter went on to address the crowd that had gathered, saying the words I just read at the beginning, again:

“... You killed the Author of life, but God raised Him from the dead. We are witnesses of this ...” (v.15)

Those were pretty harsh words for such an occasion as this: the healing of a cripple. I mean, a healing is a *good* thing, and the interest it caused among the people in this reading was a

good thing. You'd think that Peter's words would've been a little nicer, a little more charitable. But Peter wasn't interested in speaking words that were nice or charitable, *but true*. And Peter's words *were true*, true in their judgment of the people's sin of rejecting Jesus.

Peter spoke those words because he was concerned about the peoples' salvation, and the only way salvation could happen for them was for them to think again about what they had done to Jesus, and turn away from it. Peter says, again:

“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped-out, ...”
(v.19a)

Peter goes on, in the rest of his sermon, to encourage them to do that, and as he does he makes a couple of interesting points that speak to us today ...

1) **God actually wanted to save the people from the sin of what they had done to His Son.**

2) **If they refused that salvation, they would be judged for their sin, and that without excuse.**

You see, the people of Israel of Jesus' day kinda had an excuse, for as Luke relates the rest of Peter's sermon he says that Peter said:

“I know that you acted in ignorance,
as did your leaders.” (v.17)

That echoes what Jesus Himself said from the cross in Luke's Gospel:

“Father, forgive them, *for they know not* what they do.” (23:34)

The people didn't know what they and their leaders had done when they rejected Jesus, and so, in a sense, they could plead ignorance. They

could rely on what we often rely on when we do something that we at first don't know is wrong: the fact that ignorance is bliss.

BUT ignorance is no longer bliss *when you're no longer ignorant*. And that's what Peter told the crowd of people outside the Jerusalem Temple in Acts 3: they were no longer ignorant. They could see from the crippled-man-made-whole that there was power in the Name of Jesus, and they'd been told that Jesus had risen from the dead by Peter and the rest of the disciples – *the same men who'd made the crippled man whole; the same men who'd actually SEEN JESUS alive and well*. To reject Jesus now in light of this very clear witness of His resurrection would mean God's judgment on them all, with *no excuse* left for any of them.

We don't usually think of judgment in connection with Easter, but it's right there in the book of Acts, in the very next verse after those of today's First Reading, as Peter references the O.T. book of Deuteronomy by saying:

“... Moses said: ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything He tells you.’” (v.22; see also Deut. 18:18)

For Luke, throughout his Gospel, *Jesus is that great ‘Prophet like Moses’*; He is the One Who came forth from God’s people ‘of old’ to lead them in God’s ways. In his book of Acts Luke shows Peter identifying Jesus as that Prophet in the words I just quoted. And here is the thing: God had always said that those who reject the Prophet He would send them would be judged for their rejection, as Deuteronomy said:

“... whoever will not listen to My Words which He shall speak in My Name, *I Myself will require it of him.*” (18:19)

As Peter puts it in his sermon:

“Anyone who does not listen to Him will be completely cut-off from among His people.” (v.23)

The people had already failed to listen to the great ‘Prophet like Moses’ once. Now they were being given a second chance. If they rejected Jesus this time – now that He had risen from the dead, and come to them through His apostles to forgive them their sin of crucifying Him – there would be no more chances. All that would be left for them would be the judgment of *GOD’s rejection of them* by cutting them off from His people forever. Peter’s message to the Jewish people of his day was a simple one: think again:

“Think again about you did;
say you’re sorry; and be forgiven.”

Peter gives us the same message as he tells us to, in his own words:

“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped-out, ...”
(v.19a)

Peter tells us to, like those golfers at Augusta this weekend, reconsider the way we live our lives and the decisions we make that are not in keeping with living the Christian life. Peter tells us to reconsider those decisions and turn away from our sins, so that we can turn *to Christ* and, like the crippled man, be made whole with Jesus’ forgiveness. Peter tells us to think again.

[PAUSE]

Ya know, I think it’s amazing that God wanted to save the people in today’s First Reading. I mean after all, would *you* want to save people who had killed *your* Son? God did; *God DOES*. That’s what He does each and every time He brings the Word of His Son’s forgive-ness to you and me: He saves people who killed His Son.

Folks, we are no less sinful than were those crowds outside the Temple in Acts 3. And so it was for *our* sins, as well as for the sins of God's people 'of old,' that God allowed His "Righteous One" (as Peter calls Jesus in this reading) to be killed. Peter invites us today to think again about our sins and be forgiven when he says just a few short verses after those of today's First Reading:

"... God raised up His Servant, (sending Him) first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways." (v.26)

No matter what you've done, folks; no matter how bad it was and how often you did it, repent of it and you'll be forgiven. *You're already forgiven* – as we heard earlier, Jesus already forgave you from the cross. Jesus is no longer on that cross, or in the tomb. He's alive and well, and present through the preaching of His Word and the administration of His Sacraments, to forgive *you your* many sins against Him. As Peter says, again:

“Repent, then, and turn to God, *so that your sins may be wiped-out, ...*”
(v.19a)

Peter also says:

“He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything.” (v.21)

My dear friends in Christ, Jesus *is* coming again to, as Peter says: “restore everything.” When He does, *all* the lame will get up and walk healthy and whole; all the dead will be raised; the devil will be destroyed, sin and death will be no more, and all who reject the Lord Jesus will be judged once and for all, forever.

Until then, remember that it was for your sake that Jesus was given into death, and that just as He was raised to new life so too will you be raised to life eternal on the Day He comes again. As you receive that life again today – first

in returning to your Baptism by trusting our Lord's Absolution, and then by eating & drinking your Lord's Body & Blood – think back on your life of sin, and turn away from it; confess your sins and trust in God's forgiveness. Think again about Jesus, and the new life you've already begun living in Him. That life is yours, and it's forever –

– in Jesus' ✠ Name,
Amen!