

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER | APRIL 23, 2023

ACTS 2:14A, 36-41 | PSALM 116:1-4, 12-19 | 1 PETER 1:17-23 | LUKE 24:13-35

Throughout these fifty days, we begin worship with the Easter proclamation. I say *Alleluia! Christ is risen!* And you say *Christ is risen, indeed! Alleluia!* In today's reading from Acts, the crowd hears Peter's Easter proclamation—*Alleluia! Christ is risen!*—and responds slightly differently. *So what should we do?*

Good question. In this season of Easter, we hear stories of how the resurrection has changed Jesus. That he is not immediately recognizable to his disciples. That his body is transfigured in some way. That he still bears his wounds. And we also hear stories of how the resurrection has changed us. In fact, we hear so many examples of how the resurrection has changed us that by the time the crowd asks their question—*So what should we do?*—Peter has already given them one answer. And luckily for us, or at least for me, it's one that we need to unpack a bit.

Peter has just finished preaching a sermon about how “this Jesus God raised up” from death. But pay attention to how Peter identifies Jesus in today's reading. Peter is in Jerusalem, the city that rejected Jesus. And he describes Jesus as the man “whom you crucified.” Peter could have simply said Jesus, *a man that some of us knew*, or even just Jesus, *a person*. But instead, Peter chooses to identify Jesus as the one that we crucified.

Peter wants us understand that the risen Lord is also the crucified Lord. Because Peter knows that resurrection is not about erasure and amnesia but about redemption and restoration. Receiving the invitation to new life in Jesus's name is not about escaping the world, escaping our histories, or escaping our pasts but about reconciling and restoring them. And—here's the important part—the everlasting life that the risen Christ offers entails an encounter with those we have harmed. If this crowd wants to follow the risen Jesus, Peter says, it will mean coming face-to-face with the same Jesus that they rejected.

And so it is with us. Peter advises that if we are to find new life in the risen body of Christ, it will mean following Jesus toward those we have harmed.

This is—understatement of the century—difficult. We may choose to think that we don't hurt people and that our sins are all “victimless crimes” so to speak. That—to use the language of today's confession—our pride, our self-centeredness, and our silence may be bad in theory, but they have no real effect on others in practice. That when we talk about how sin draws us away from love of God and neighbor, these are just metaphors.

Or, if we do muster up the courage to acknowledge the harm that we've caused, we may be tempted to just avoid individuals that we've hurt. Maybe we're afraid that they might retaliate and get back at us. Or maybe we avoid them because their presence reminds us of parts of us we'd rather not think about. Re-encountering people we've hurt is rarely something we're doing to do if left to our own devices.

But remember that this is an Easter story. And Easter doesn't just change Jesus; it changes us. And one of the things it changes is how we relate to those that we have hurt. After all, when the risen Jesus triumphs over death and returns to his disciples, he doesn't condemn them. He doesn't ask them why they didn't step up and do better when they were in Jerusalem. He offers them forgiveness, reconciliation, and purpose. Instead of

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perpetuating our cycles of violence, instead responding in kind or retaliating, Jesus gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit and offers us a different way of life.

Peter of all people should know that. If anyone had reason to just forget the people he hurt and move on with a fresh start, it was Peter. If anyone had a reason to say his actions didn't really harm anyone, it was Peter. But the risen Christ has invited Peter into a new way of life. And that new way of life is what Peter invites the crowd to in today's reading.

So what then should we do? The answer is the same to that crowd two thousand years ago as it is to us today. Use God's life-giving Easter power—what we call the Holy Spirit—to work to redeem, reconcile, and renew God's creation. And as Peter reminds us, that doesn't just mean looking towards God's promised future, but addressing what's been done in the past.

We do this in our personal lives and in our relationships. Maybe you've been in a relationship where you just have to own up to your behavior in the past because you realize it's become a barrier to moving forward. Or those of you who have been in twelve step programs know that one of the steps involves addressing people who you've hurt and working to make amends. The process of healing addiction isn't just about fixing our relationship with substances but improving our relationships with others.

We do this as church, too. A few years ago, we participated in our synod's anti-racism challenge to educate ourselves about the ways racism has harmed this church and raise funds to provide scholarships for Lutherans of African descent. As a congregation, we've publicly committed to full inclusion for people regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. It was important for us to make that commitment because, prior to 2009, we discriminated against people on that basis. And just last week, Bishop Eaton announced a churchwide initiative to address the harm the church has caused to Indigenous people, including investigating our involvement with Indian boarding schools and making financial amends where appropriate.

Is this kind of work always pleasant? No. It can be awkward and uncomfortable. Do we do these things perfectly? No. Sometimes, we make our reverent best guess and end up thinking, *I should have done it differently.* That's okay. Peter doesn't tell us that turning toward those we've hurt is easy or pleasant or that we'll get it right all the time. No, Peter tells us that since Jesus has triumphed over sin and death, there is nothing that can separate us from love of God and love of neighbor.

There are no people who are too far off. There are no evils that are too unentrenched. There are no situations that are too far gone. But in the crucified and risen body of Christ, the love of God fills all in all.

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