

April 14, 2024
Third Sunday of Easter

“His Performative Peace”

Luke 24:36-49

St. John bestows upon us these wonderful assurances of God’s eternal favor: *“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God: and so we are.”* And he continues, *“Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared...”*

John makes clear that our status as children of God is a present, right now, condition. Yes, there is more to come, but this very moment we are God’s children, holy saints under His favor, in possession of eternal life. We are like Christ, through His blood-bought forgiveness, without sin.

Hard to believe though, isn’t it? We keep on sinning. How can this be true? I hope you don’t see it, but I struggle mightily with anger. When I drive, when I read the news, when I simply ponder challenges and stressors in life, I find the silliest things to get angry about and my blood boils. This is without a doubt sin. God’s whole law is summed up in a single word—love. Anger is the opposite of that. Yet, even on a quiet Sunday morning before church, I probably sin in anger at least half a dozen times...much more if I don’t have my coffee.

Each of us has this struggle, maybe it’s not anger with you. It might be greed, lust, pride, covetousness, or just loving yourself or something of this world way too much, but whatever it is seems to be continually knocking you out of line with the loving holiness to which you are called. So yes, it is hard to fathom how repeat offenders like us can right now in the midst of that be the holy children of God. Jesus in the Gospel lesson today tells us how.

This is Luke’s writing of the same Easter evening appearance we heard about from St. John last week but Luke highlights the reaction of Jesus’ disciples: *“Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, ‘Peace to you!’”* I take this as more than your everyday “Shalom” greeting. I take this as performative; Jesus declaring peace exists between himself and these disciples...but they don’t seem to take it that way.

“But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit.” Why the fear? Obviously they are seeing the rabbi they abandoned in Gethsemane who was crucified and most surely dead, and they think his angry spirit has returned to torment them. But Jesus calms them with the proofs He is truly risen from the dead. But then He explains what has taken place: *“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...Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations.”*

And there you have it! Jesus here, and also previous to this explaining to those two disciples on the road to Emmaus, has carried out GOD’s Word, GOD’s plan, GOD’s will for the redemption of His own creation in Christ Jesus. This salvation thing, this being made a holy saint before God is not initiated by, performed by or accomplished by you at all in any way, shape or form. This entire thing is laid out by God in His Word—His Word that shows how absolutely awful we human creatures are at the whole holiness and love thing, but reveals How wonderfully gracious and merciful God is at the taking care of His beloved people thing.

I want you to remember this and take it to heart—you stand saved by God because of God, not because of you. But don't stop there, take to heart this also—your sins do not nullify the peace with God Jesus has created.

I think lots of folks react to our One True God in the same manner the disciples did to Christ—frightened. They'd abandoned Him, offended Him, and though He declares "Peace to you!" they aren't feeling it. They are ashamed and expect some type of retribution. They don't get what Christ's resurrection means.

Now, a healthy, respectful fear of God is right and good, He is Almighty God after all. But when we come before Him with our sins in repentance as we must, I think we can make the mistake of continually dwelling on ourselves in those sins. My sinful anger has been hanging out in my life for decades and, quite frankly, I don't see it going away. So if I dwell on that what is my reality? All sinner, with reason to fear God's wrath.

But what is the reality God speaks? "Peace to you!" Mission accomplished! Promise fulfilled! Sin atoned for—past, present and future sin! This is the Gospel message of Jesus—that despite the evil deeds you have done, He has done THE deed that cancels it all! And THAT is where we need to put our focus.

If you examine God's means of grace the focus is obvious. Yes, we come as beggars in repentance, but it is God's work of forgiveness that dominates. In baptism you are washed through Christ into death, the grave and already into His resurrected life; none of it you, all of it God. In the absolution Christ ordained, your sin, by God's Word and power alone, is declared forgiven. Same with the Holy Supper—Christ Himself for you for the forgiveness of sin. "Peace to you!"

And yes, I know those words in John's epistle can be troubling. "*No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.*" But John frames this statement with the prior word "*Everyone who makes a practice of sinning.*" Throughout the letter John is clear that we who love Jesus practice repentance, not sin, continually turning to Christ for grace because we know that forgiveness is accomplished and sin is powerless.

One of my professors from seminary translates this passage as "*everyone who lives for the sake of sin.*" I like that, because we who love Jesus can know that's not us. We desperately desire to live for the sake of Christ, despite all these sins that continue to gnaw at our soul.

So I really want you to take this to heart and take it home with you today. You stand saved and redeemed in Christ and your sins do not, cannot nullify what Jesus has accomplished. Let this truth strengthen you in joyfully turning and following Him and shunning the temptations of the world.

If you struggle with this, pray the Lord's Prayer and stop at the introduction and ponder it: "*Our Father who art in heaven...*" This is your reality because Jesus has made it so because this is the Father's will, in spite of your sins. The plan of God was your redemption and the risen Christ is the guarantee that the mission is accomplished. It IS finished.

So yes, repent of your sins, but then look away from them and to your Savior without fear of His wrath and hear Him speak into your ears, "Peace to you!"

Amen.