

Third Sunday of Easter April 15

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is good news. That seems to go without saying for us. But think about the first folks to hear that message for a moment. For the guys who had stood in the square and shouted “crucify him!” it might not have been such good news. For the members of the Sanhedrin which had condemned him and manipulated Pilate into crucifying him, it probably was even worse news. After all, if you try to rid yourself of a troublesome peasant preacher whom you think to be a revolutionary, his reappearance on the stage is not a good thing, especially if it means that he was right about God and we were wrong. Think about a young Pharisee on the way to Damascus to arrest the followers of this pretender. Did Saul, at least at his first realization that this was Jesus to whom he spoke, did Saul really think this was a good thing? Probably not. It meant that everything he believed and was doing was misguided and wrong. And yet, it would become the best news for him.

We hear today the sermon Peter preached to the people of Jerusalem in the Temple after the lame man was healed. (You might want to brush up on “He went walking and leaping and praising God!”) Undoubtedly the crowd included some of the very people who crucified Christ. This will be a strong Law and Gospel sort of sermon. Peter essentially accused them of killing the Author of life. To what does one compare that sort of an act? This is a little like some kid finding his way into the nuclear reactor control room and accidentally hitting the self-destruct button or some random computer user hitting the wrong button and deleting all the computer files,....at Citibank. The enormity of what Peter dumps on them is huge.

The question for us to day is who is afraid of the resurrection? Is anyone afraid of it? They had done something so heinously enormous, but we were not in that crowd outside of Pilate’s residence on that early Friday morning, or were we?

Do we have something to fear in the resurrection? If we don’t, do we have any reason to rejoice? What if Jesus had come back to settle scores? What if he was only the Savior of some, a handful who got the right code word? What if he only rose from the dead for folks who had memorized all of Luther’s Catechism, backwards, or something arcane like that? What if he came back really angry at the people who said you had to memorize Luther’s Catechism backwards? What if that was us?

Is there any trepidation to be found in the empty tomb? The disciples encounter the risen Christ in Luke’s Gospel and they are afraid. Jesus ate a piece of fish to set their fears at ease. He is not some evil ghostly spirit. Perhaps we need to listen to our culture and what it says about the “undead” today. Have any of you ever watched one of those really campy zombie movies? A little article in our paper recently listed possible zombie versions of literary classics. Things like “Moldy Dick – call me fishmeal – Captain Ahab reunites with his long lost leg and proceeds to kick some whale tale” There is a segment of the society which loves these things. Is there a way to catch that wave of popularity in the discussion of the Gospel lesson today? Is there any way to do it and respect yourself after you’ve done it? Is there any way to do it without bringing scorn

and ridicule upon the Gospel? I am not sure. Perhaps we should let that one pass, but the preacher has to ask this question. How will we preach this resurrection message the third Sunday of Easter?

In past iterations of these notes we wondered: Why do we say “He is Risen!” for the fifty days of Easter. I thought that the discussion was worth repeating.

1. His resurrection means our resurrection – but this is what we said on Easter.
2. Without the resurrection our faith is in vain, we don’t have a message to preach!
3. Advertisers tell us we need to present our message seven times to get it to really sink in. So we keep saying it, for seven weeks, we keep saying it.
4. There is a great deal of clutter which is obscuring this message. The 24 hour news cycle, the political morass that is Washington, the threats on the world stage all can converge to drown this out. So we patiently repeat it.
5. There is more to this than a hope for the future; although, this hope does affect the way we live today, the way we face death, the way we approach everything.
6. What is he doing today? Is he just sitting up in heaven listening to the heavenly top 40 this week – sung perfectly by angels? Hardly. He is active right now. He is doing things for me right now.
 - a. He is my shepherd – that’s next week.
 - b. He is teaching me. (This week?)
 - c. He is empowering me, strengthening me.
 - d. He is leading his people, the church.
 - e. He rules over all for the sake of the Church (Ephesians)
 - f. He is reigning through my words – forgiving people through me.
 - g. He is healing sick people, visiting the shut-in, healing broken relationships, comforting the grieving widow, etc.
 - h. He is advocating/praying on our behalf in heaven – pleading our case before the Father (I John 1-2)
 - i. He is conquering satan’s power – casting out the demons.
 - j. He simply is “with us” even the end of the earth, to the very end of the age. It is simply good to have Jesus there with us, every day. He loves us. He rose from the dead to be with us.

Collect of the Day

O God, through the humiliation of Your Son You raised up the fallen world. Grant to Your faithful people, rescued from the peril of everlasting death, perpetual gladness and eternal joys; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

This prayer really asks us to think about salvation/justification in a way that is not entirely comfortable to Lutherans; it looks at it from a more Eastern Orthodox perspective known as "Apotheosis." This is a participatory model of salvation instead of a legal or court room metaphor. In this model God enters his creation, participates fully in it, runs the whole human race, and in bottoming out in the grave collects the whole broken creation to himself. Upon rising from the dead, Jesus then brings the whole thing back up to heaven with himself. In the fact that God is participating with us, we then are participants with God. His resurrection becomes our resurrection.

The Orthodox don't talk much about "justification" as a metaphor, this is the way that they talk about the great work of Jesus. It works especially well to talk about this in terms of death and resurrection because Jesus did this. It gets a little more complex when you talk about it in the moral sphere because it can lead to a sort of triumphalist or "conquering sin" sort of mentality, a theology of glory. But, that said, it is a very effective way to speak about the resurrection. Jesus has entered our sinful world in Christmas, descended to the very depths of death and grave and found us there. This is effective because it essentially makes dying the prerequisite human work for heaven. We are all rather good at dying, it is something none of us fails to do. It is in the grave that we are united to Christ, not in our best moments, but in our lowest and dearest moment. Jesus did not skim through the upper reaches of the human existence, asking us to reach up to him, but he came down to the very grave which swallows us all, and it is there in its filth and decay that we are all found.

We ask God to give us a gift now: perpetual gladness and eternal joy. The gift of life might seem like a joyful and gladsome thing, but it is not necessarily so. The ancient Greek myth of Narcissus reminds us that eternal life is only part of the equation. In that story the gods grant deathless life to a young man but don't halt the aging process. He lives forever, but keeps getting frailer and more wrinkled with every passing year. Soon the gift becomes something of a curse.

We ask for a joyful and gladsome eternal life, a gift from the real God. We have a hard time with the joyful sometimes. That has serious implications for the proclamation of the good news. Who wants to listen to a crab? Yet, we often present to the world a grumpy face. Ancient Romans were impressed that Christians went joyfully to their martyrdoms. What does the world see about us? I think we need God to answer this prayer and keep us in perpetual gladness and joy. He has raised up the world. Open our eyes to see and rejoice in that!

We are already in the rescued category in this prayer. It is true about us right now. Can we be anything but joyful? Is our grumpiness fundamentally a denial of that truth? That is frightening to contemplate.

Readings

Acts 3:11-21 *For reasons which I further outline below, I have given you the whole chapter 3.*

Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. ² And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple. ³ Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. ⁴ And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." ⁵ And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. ⁶ But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" ⁷ And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. ⁸ And leaping up he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. ⁹ And all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰ and recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

¹¹ While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's. ¹² And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? ¹³ The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. ¹⁴ But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, ¹⁵ and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. ¹⁶ And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

¹⁷ "And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. ¹⁸ But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. ¹⁹ Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, ²⁰ that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, ²¹ whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. ²² *Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. ²³ And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.'* ²⁴ *And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. ²⁵ You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be*

blessed. ' 26 God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness. "

I included the rest of the chapter which includes some more of Peter's sermon for our context here. I understand why the editors of the pericope wanted to focus our attention on these middle verses. A whole chapter is hard for many folks to hear. But I am wondering if the desire to have the message of the middle verses highlighted also does not change what they mean as well. When they are lifted from the context of the story in which this sermon is embedded, do we hear it the same way?

The text prior to Peter's speech and the guy who is hanging onto him is the lame man whom Peter and John bid to rise up and walk in the name of Jesus. Of course he has been walking and leaping and praising God. That miracle and the fuss it created was the occasion for this little sermon by Peter.

As I noted above, Peter accuses them of killing the Author of life, even though Pilate wanted to release him. God, vindicating Jesus and condemning their illegal murder of Jesus, has raised him from the dead. Peter's attestation of witnesses is important here. In Jewish law if 12 men said that they saw something happen, it was an established fact. This is why they were careful to choose a witness to both the ministry of Jesus and the resurrection to be the replacement of Judas. (See the end of Acts 1 in which Matthias is chosen to replace Judas.)

The other key element of Peter's sermon is the attestation that the risen Christ is still active. Here Peter is clear, Jesus has come to forgive their sins, even this sin of killing him. In fact, Jesus has come to them first (vs 26) in order that he might forgive and bless the very men who had handed him over and demanded his death. The proof is in the healing of the lame man. It was the name of Jesus, his power, not Peter and John's that gave this man strength to stand up on the limbs that had been useless. Peter is very careful not to take credit that does not belong to him. That will be especially important when the Ananias and Sapphira incident happens in a chapter 5. The real issue there is taking credit for what one did not do. The name of Jesus implies the presence of Jesus – see the exodus account of the name of YHWH going before the people or filling the temple at its dedication in Chronicles.

Then, in the next paragraph, Peter lets them off the hook. They acted in ignorance. Now mind you, Jesus was just as dead despite their ignorance, so I am not sure how that really helps. I think he was actually reflecting something of his own experience in this. After all, Peter himself had betrayed Jesus. He too acted foolishly that night. God is not taking this personally, God is not angry. No one got this right, they did not, the rulers did not, nor did the 12 members of the apostle club get it right. Of course there are other ways to interpret this as well. In fact, acting in malice against him and acting in ignorance because one has deliberately closed one's ears and eyes to his message and signs is not necessarily a better place to be. One of my students once

pointed out that Adam and Eve had their eyes opened but in so doing they saw less, as they covered themselves lest they be seen.

More than their ignorance, he appeals to God's plan. God had foretold this through the prophets and this was all according to his great scheme of salvation which had been slowly unfolding for millennia prior to the birth of Jesus. The hearers of Peter's sermon are given to believe that they live in a special moment of time. Despite their great sin, it is a time of great forgiveness. God comes with refreshment, which God has always intended for them. Turn, repent, God is gracious to you. It is a complete sermon, in two paragraphs. I know my parishioners wish that I had pulled that off on occasion, but the dramatic illustration of having a lame man running about meant that he did not have to do a lot of development here, so I guess we are off the hook. Now, if you ever find yourself in this sort of a situation, it might be good to remember that sometimes less is more.

I am also noticing that the people are attracted to the joy of the lame man. They are not attracted to the strong law gospel sermon which Peter preaches, as true as it is. They come because of his joy. Do we show the world our Easter joy? Or do we show the world our budget worried face. Do we have ways that we as a community express joy? How do we do that? I remember the Lutherans in the Midwest, they knew how to have a party. One congregation in the Milwaukee area I knew had a bowling alley in the basement and a hole in the wall through which the beer tap was fed from the keg in the cooler. They knew how to have fun. I find that my western US Lutherans sometimes take themselves far too seriously.

How can we preach this text to our congregations? The people to whom we preach were not there shouting in the square before Pilate's palace demanding Jesus' crucifixion. These folks were there. This is perhaps two or three months after Jesus death and resurrection. These are the people who put to death the Author of Life. We could develop the corporate guilt that all humanity bears because we were vicariously there to do that. But does that have traction? Will our people yawn when we say that they were the ones shouting "Crucify!"

We could try to bring into the present. We likely would have followed the crowd in the first century, in much the same way follow the crowd today. How many stand up for the millions who are murdered in abortion? Perhaps you do. But do you object to the cheap shoes that were made by a slave laborer in some third world country? Do you just go along with the crowd? That might work.

We also might be wondering about the healing of the man. The people flock to Peter like it is some show. But Peter upbraids them for their skepticism. How could this not be? Jesus is risen from the dead. Do we think that anything really will happen because Jesus is risen from the dead? Or like the folks of the first century do we hear the story of the resurrection and yawn, cynical and jaded. Is that really the crowd that Peter is talking to?

Psalm 4

Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness!

You have given me relief when I was in distress.

Be gracious to me and hear my prayer!

² O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame?

How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? Selah

³ But know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself;
the LORD hears when I call to him.

⁴ Be angry, and do not sin;

ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. Selah

⁵ Offer right sacrifices,
and put your trust in the LORD.

⁶ There are many who say, "Who will show us some good?"

Lift up the light of your face upon us, O LORD!"

⁷ You have put more joy in my heart
than they have when their grain and wine abound.

⁸ In peace I will both lie down and sleep;
for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.

This is a really interesting Psalm for this day. In the first verse, who is speaking? Is it the lame man? Is it us? Who would we say this is? Is it some generic "everyman"?

Verse two is clearly God speaking, is he speaking to us? Is he speaking to the citizens of Jerusalem? In what sense is he speaking to us? To them?

Verse three could be best described as a description of Jesus, but it could also be Peter and John praying for the lame man in the Acts text.

Is verse four then the summation of Peter's words to the citizens of Jerusalem in the temple that day? Peter's words would have, if believed, sparked an intense shame and self-loathing for what they had done. "Be angry" encourages the psalmist. At whom? Is it at ourselves?

Doesn't that just make verse five dynamic. What is the right sacrifice? They are in the temple, but the real sacrifice was offered once for all on a hill outside of town, called Golgotha. They should trust in YHWH.

The Psalmist then expresses the hope and the prayer of the faithful. God has given us something better than material blessings of harvest and plenty. We have a contentment, the angst of the crowd to whom Peter spoke is relieved. I will lie down and sleep in peace. For the Lord alone makes me to dwell in safety. Tension and resolution. It is all there in Psalm 4.

I John 3:1-7

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. ³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

⁴ Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. ⁵ You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. ⁶ No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. ⁷ Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. ⁸ *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.* ⁹ *No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.* ¹⁰ *By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.*

I think that the only way to preach I John 3:1-3 is as a Lutheran who gets Law and Gospel and Sinner and Saint tension. John says we are God's children now. This the saint part of that equation. We will be revealed to be like Christ on that last day, but we are that right now. Lutherans struggle to preach this sometimes, we are very good at the Lenten emphasis on the Sinner but the Saint is also fully there. It appears that John's opponents wanted to spiritualize the saintliness, taking it out of the incarnational matrix and put it into the realm of the unreal. But we are fully saint – physical and spiritual and emotional and all the rest of it. We are wholly saint. John will not let us spiritualize that. (Remember last week's intro to the whole book – he has touched it!)

If you want to follow up on the touch metaphor you might have used last week, consider the fact that today we are called the children of God. A father lovingly picking up his child could work really well for continuing that. If we are children of God, can we do better than to say that he puts his arms around us today?

John asserts the love of God to us, we are called the children of God and it is the truth. The world which did not recognize him does not recognize us either, but being called the children of God means something very real when God is the speaker. The preacher who is interested in this case will want to explore the whole idea of performative utterance. When God says something it happens just because he said it. He is literally incapable of speaking falsehood because as soon as he says it, that thing of which speaks springs into being just as he described it. I suppose this means he has to be quite careful about what he says.

But John also must struggle with the incarnational dilemma. If Christ is here, why can I not see him? If Christ is present in this world, why does it look so broken? There is a time of waiting between the speaking and the seeing of this new reality. But we know the day comes when we

shall also see what God has said. On that last day we shall see Christ and we shall be able to bear that sight because will be like him, as he is now. What do you think that means for us?

John seems to direct our attention to purity. The one who is expecting to see Jesus and be like Jesus can expect purity. I wonder if our people get excited about that idea? I mean eternal life sounds good, being eternally young sounds even better to a culture which is fixated on youth. Being heirs of heavenly treasure sounds really good for people in economic troubling times, but purity does not sound like nearly as much fun. In fact, we often think of purity as being the opposite of fun. Will heaven then really be a never ending party with tea and cakes but never any beer? Will it just involve listening angelic choirs sing complex melodies, going to Church, or watching G rated movies forever? Is it possible to be pure and fun at the same time? What would that look like? Can we imagine it? More importantly can we preach to our people in such a way that they don't hear purity and immediately leap to "boring?"

The next verses again demonstrate John's sometimes frustrating ability to give and take away in the same breath. He sets up opposites and then brings them together, truths that resolve into tension and vice versa. One cannot indulge in sin, dive in head first, and call oneself a Christian. And yet, last week he said that if we do sin the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all unrighteousness. Our brothers and sisters in the holiness movements have a doctrine called "complete sanctification" in which they take this to sort of an extreme, suggesting that in conversion God has totally purified our will. We will still sin, we are not perfect people and sometimes we will in ignorance or for other reasons sin, but we will never want to.

Of course that creates some problems within those bodies. My neighbor is a wonderful person but she has been baptized four or five times because of this. After some difficult times in her life and having done some things of which she was ashamed, she had concluded that she had not been completely converted before. She sinned and enjoyed it, you see. This necessitated a deeper conversion and a true baptism in place of what had obviously been an incomplete conversion and hence a fraudulent baptism. I am wondering how she can trust the current baptism. I am not sure that she does.

I think there is another way to read this. John is doing something else with these words. We could run with this into the Pauline "New Man and Old Man" dichotomy and assume that John is speaking here of the old man, the wretched sinner who clings to us and whom God drowns in baptismal remembrance and renewal every day. That can work, but it might not be quite what John had in mind either.

Look to the words which are excised from our reading but which I have included above. John paints this in even starker words. The sinner is of the Devil, the righteous man is of God. Yikes, that rather leaves all of us on the down escalator at the end of time, doesn't it?

The key seems to come later in the chapter in the incarnation. John starts to tie this sinning and purity to the act of loving one another. It is rather the issue of the Old Testament command to

keep the Torah. The Torah was not kept in the perfect adherence to the rules, but in bringing one's sin to God. Likewise the relationship will certainly involve occasions when the person has sinned, and sometimes even enjoyed it, but the relationship ultimately is what is important, the sorrow is expressed, the love is restored. The Jesus who has become flesh and blood in the incarnation has changed the way we view the neighbor. We can no longer just walk away.

We will develop a sermon on the I John series and the theme today is "Living as the Children of God" John challenges us on several fronts here. Clearly this means something is different about us. But what? Is it that we lead such morally superior lives? I don't think so. I think the difference is what we do with the garbage of our lives.

Luke 24:36-49

³⁶ As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!" ³⁷ But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. ³⁸ And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹ See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." ⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹ And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate before them.

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, "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." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ 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."

Isn't Jesus really doing an object lesson in this first paragraph? The disciples are not getting it, but he won't let them sit there in their ignorance, he will teach them.

Luke records for us the account which we read last week in John, the appearance of the Lord to the disciples the first night of Easter. Those who were talking "about these things" are the Emmaus disciples who had hurried back to Jerusalem with their burning news. It is in their retelling of this that the Lord shows up among that group.

In the first paragraph Luke invites us to marvel with the disciples at the sheer wonder of the resurrection. Like Thomas last week, we are given the wherewithal to believe the message. The disciples look, touch, and watch him eat. This is no spirit, no ghoul who has returned from death to torment the living. This really is their teacher and friend. Notice how John and Luke do this differently. In John's account he really stresses the giving of the Spirit, the joy and the wounds of Christ in the middle of that peace. Luke will hold on the Spirit gift until Pentecost. They marvel and still cannot believe it, but their disbelief is not the toxic kind like Thomas's but is the joyful

disbelief of someone who has just experienced a great boon. Think about picking up a lottery ticket and realizing that it was a jackpot. How many times would you have to look at that number? Wouldn't you have to check and re-check those numbers time and again before you "really could believe it?"

But while Luke holds on describing the gift of the Spirit until the feast of Pentecost, it is clear that Jesus gives it here. In the second paragraph above he opens their minds to understand the Scriptures. Those Scriptures are of course the Old Testament since none of the NT was written at the time. It was written that the Christ should suffer and die and the third day rise again.

But where is that written in the Old Testament? Isaiah 53 would be one place. Psalm 22, Psalm 69, Psalm 118, Hosea 6 and others. They are strung together by men like Paul and others to create a totally different way to read the OT so that they find Jesus behind every verse. I think this also applies to understanding how fishermen like John and Peter or tax collectors like Matthew really could write the profound books which we read in the NT. If you believe Jesus did something here, then their minds really were opened, they got a profound gift this day.

It is also interesting that Jesus asserts that they are witnesses to these things. Peter also uses that term. It might be a good day to remember that term and the classic description of every Christian as a witness. They saw the resurrected Christ and bore testimony to what they saw. Our Christian witness is not merely repeating what they saw, but also telling what we have seen and relating to the world around us the good news that we have seen Christ in action too. If we would stand here and say that Jesus has done nothing in our lives, we are not much for witnessing, but then again, we might not be much for Christians either. It would make one wonder why anyone would join such a group if it was just for the bad coffee and the sometimes crabby fellowship.

Law

1. I may believe the resurrection, but it seems so long ago, so distant from my world. What can I really say about it? It is another world in which Jesus walked and spoke with his disciples. This is the twenty-first century and I am cut off by the 80 generations of people who have lived and died since these disciples saw this. The witness seems like a remote and distant whisper, an echo indistinctly heard.
2. How does one have a party for something that so old? How can I get some of that Joy which the disciples felt and the lame man felt in the readings today? How often haven't we seen a new member come in with joy and watched with dismay as it was slowly sapped away by endless committee meetings. If someone stood up and rejoiced in worship today, what would happen? Would we squirm in discomfort?
3. My tepid faith in Christ's resurrection saps my Christianity of joy, strength, vigor, and any sense of urgency. The only thing that might get me off my pew is the thought that there might not be enough money to meet budget if we don't get some more members

4. Because we are not seized by the resurrection event and transformed, we often turn upon one another and our parishes can become bickering and divided places. The love of which John writes so eloquently seems like a distant thing as well. My relationship with my fellow congregant is not a relationship of love; instead, it is a relationship of by-laws which is much worse than even the much scorned relationship of in-laws.
5. Crippled by my sin, I feel powerless and helpless to change any of this. I am no better than the folks who cried ‘crucify, crucify’ They at least cared about something enough get up on a Friday morning and show up at 6 AM to protest. I grouse about 8 AM worship once a week.

Gospel

1. Christ lives and reigns today as well. Active and living in the lives of his people, he continues to make his presence known among us in Word and deed. The eyes of the Christian are opened by His Spirit gift to see Him in the feeding of the hungry, the forgiving of the sinner, the healing of the sick, the peace and new community which comes from His service among us right now. What have you seen him do lately?
2. Eyes opened by Christ and his Spirit we get to have joy. We don’t have to look for a miracle long ago, we can experience Christ in our lives right now, baptism and supper, but also community, love, miracles of healing, and prayers answered.
3. Eyes opened and directed to see, Christ resurrects the tepid faith of his people today, bestowing on them the joy of the man who walked and leapt and praised God. The urgency of the Emmaus disciples hurrying along the darkening Judean roads and filling us with the joy of the disciples who just cannot believe this news it is so good. That is the sort of thing that one simply must share.
4. Seeing the resurrected Christ in action in our midst means that our attention is diverted from the irritants and the conflicts to see the urgent mission that Christ has given us. I don’t know why he has called me to serve with these guys, but I know that there are really people out there dying to hear and experience this same thing. Excited by what I have seen, I can take the neighbor by the hand to go and tell.
5. I am helpless and powerless to do this, but Christ is not. He comes with rich gifts of mind, heart, spirit, and message. He gives purpose to my life, he gives joy to my heart, he gives a message which comes tumbling out of my mouth, he puts eagerness in my footsteps and my actions.

Sermon Ideas

1. Living as the Children of God (Epistle Series – That the hearer would live as the child of God, hoping in (expecting) the promise which God has made to him/her in Christ’s resurrection.)

What does it mean to live as the child of someone? I am the child of a Lutheran pastor and his wife. How do I live as their child? What does that change about the words I say or the deeds I do? I go to church a lot. Always have. I have a particular way of solving problems. I tend to see things through a preacher's lens. How does it change the way I think about myself or perceive myself. I do like Lenten hymns, I suppose that says something about my self-perception.

The Christian is called the child of God, perhaps nowhere else so clearly as John does here. Although, the Lord's Prayer which begins, "Our Father..." certainly embeds this idea in our weekly worship as well. We are given the right to say those words honestly, not just as a pious wish, but as the baptized children of God.

John seems to give us a few things to think about as we are called children of God, each or all of which could be developed into a sermon.

- a. The world does not know you – the child of God lives in some tension with the world around us. Conformity to the world seems to be a denial of our child of God status. It is fundamental to who we are. It did not know Jesus either and our connection to Him makes us odd and unrecognizable to the world as well. This can be painful. We like to be accepted and welcomed.
- b. We have hope – We will see him as he is. We will be able to do so, because we are like him. One gets the sense that the rest of the world will not be able to tolerate that vision, but we will be able to.
- c. This is an appearing, not a coming, both in terms of Jesus showing up and in terms of our true nature. This implies that Jesus is already here. He is not coming, but he is appearing. It also implies something about us: we are already this child of God but we cannot really see it either. There is a hiddenness both to Jesus and to ourselves. Lutherans speak of being sinner and saint. Jesus' kingdom is now/not yet. That tension shows up in this text.
- d. We are purified. I see this text as describing a process, not an accomplished fact. We will be like him, but that suggests that we are not right now. The purification is part of that becoming like Jesus. Jesus is doing this to us right now. (This can be pastorally important. If you declare that we are pure any reasonable person will take a good hard look at his/her life and determine that you are talking about someone else. At the same time, the sinner/saint dichotomy almost demands that we make that assertion. Herein lies another preaching tension.)
- e. This purity means that we are heading in another direction than the world which is enslaved to Satan, Sin, and Death. John's words on "lawlessness" need to be carefully understood and proclaimed here. The eager, willful sinner is lawless, without restraint, without any submission to the law. John is not suggesting that

Christians no longer commit sins, have sinful habits and addictions, or that they have somehow conquered their sinful behaviors. There is however a sinning which is born of lawlessness and there is a sinner which is born of our human frailty and reality that we are both sinner and saint. The difference between the sinning of the Christian and the sinning of the lawless person is that we are called to repentance, we bring those sins to God for forgiveness. In effect, our sinning is not lawless, because we place it under the judgment of God's law. We recognize that these sins need to be forgiven. The lawless one refuses to acknowledge that they are sins and hence needs no forgiveness. There is no need to repent, they are natural and normal. Empowered by the Spirit, we recognize our sins for what they are, transgressions of the law, grieve over them, and seek God's forgiveness. That is a sinning which is not lawless, but one which lives under/in the law. Sin is always a breaking of the law, but lawless sinning imagines that there is no law.

- f. So much of the world in which we live has subscribed to this lawlessness. We have said that there are no sins. Divorce is not a sin. Smoking pot is not against the law. Living together is a good idea in many eyes, homosexuality is simply another expression of sexual identity. There is no law which applies to any of us.
- g. This means that living as the child of God means that we are always coming to God for the gift he so lovingly bestows on children. The highest form of our worship is our penitent prayer for forgiveness. We come again and again with the same sins. God is not ever bothered by that. He does not say that we have failed him for the last time like some celestial Darth Vader. He is delighted that we once more have placed our sins, yes the same ones, under the Law once more and he forgives them. Jesus died and rose for that one too.
- h. We were worried about the person who would take this as a license to sin more. But this is lawlessness. John says in verse 6 that the person who continues in this sin does not know Jesus, does not have Jesus abiding in him/her. Such a license to sin attitude is directly contrary to the very children we have been called to be. Children want to please their father. The child who rebels against his/her father is in fact lawless. But this image is hard. Some folks don't have good memories of parental love. Abused people will have a hard time with this.
- i. Philippians 3:16 – live up to what we have already attained. We are the children of God. The challenge presented to us to live that way. But don't let this suck the joy of this. We are the children of God. We have attained. We are the children of God right now. That means that we know the ending of this story. We know how this is right now and we know how this will end up. The father has lavished love on us (I John 3:1 NIV).

The preacher may want to break out one of these as an exemplar of living as a child of God or he may want to run through the whole catalogue. The goal, however, is that the person live this life. We will proclaim that we are right now the children of God. That means something for the way we deal with the realities of this life. It also will mean something beautiful on the day of our Lord Jesus' revelation, the last day of this old creation's timekeeping. We deal with the current realities in light of that anticipated day. Sin never overwhelms us, but we know that it is broken by the power of the resurrected One who is with us now and like whom we too will be seen to be. It has no power over us.

2. Witness to the Resurrected Christ (Acts and Gospel - That the hearer would focus his/her attention on the present and active Christ in this time and this place, and seeing and believing this Jesus risen from the dead would then be made into an active witness of Christ to neighbor, family and friend.)
 - a. A witness is simply someone who tells what he or she has seen. It is not a complicated thing, it is not a magic or a particularly difficult thing. It is simply telling what you have seen.
 - b. Jesus has made you a witness of the resurrection. No, you have not like the disciples today stood in that locked upper room and watched him eat a piece of fish. We can only see that through their eyes, but others can see him through your eyes. For this Jesus who rose so long ago still lives and reigns to all eternity, including this day.
 - c. Look around you today, look at these people whom he has gathered today. Just this gathering is something of a miracle. Today he has gathered millions of people into churches just like ours. In all of those assemblies are more than a few stories of what that Jesus has done. Have you ever seen him heal someone the doctors gave up on like the lame man in Acts? Have you ever seen a broken relationship healed, forgiveness given, a miracle done? I have. You have too, Be a witness.
 - d. Jesus is not asking you to tell anyone else's story. He has made you a witness, someone with a story to tell. Yes, let it be shaped by the Gospels and the rest of Scripture, but it is always your story. Tell it, run with the Emmaus disciples, cling to their arms like the lame man, tell the story.

We often are a little shy about that term witness, but it should not be so. There is nothing easier in the world than to be a witness. All you have to do is tell folks what you have seen. You see, telling them someone else's story, something you have learn and memorize, that is not nearly as powerful of a witness as if you tell your own story. Yes, the Apostolic witness is important. It shapes my witnessing and directs my attention to

what I should be looking for. I open my eyes to the world around me and I can see the same Jesus of Nazareth caring for the poor and hungry, healing the sick in the hospitals which bear his name, forgiving the sinners in the absolutions we speak, transforming sinners into saints, and comforting folks in every tribulation. He is not the God of some ancient disciples and apostles who are long dead, he lives and reigns today.

An illustration of what I mean: One day while I was pastor in Roseburg we were in the middle of a building project and early in the morning, just after I arrived, Willie, the Laborer for Christ in charge of the project asked me to pray. It seems that we had to get a power pole moved from one end of our lot to another so that power could be extended into the new building. But the power company said it would take three weeks. So we prayed, and later that morning, when I met my Monday morning Bible study, we prayed again. After the Bible study I went outside to greet the parents of the preschoolers who were picking up their kids. I struck up a conversation with a woman I had never talked to before. She asked how the project was going and I told her that it was well, but we needed to get this power pole moved and the power company was being a little slow for us. She got a big smile on her face and told me that her husband worked with the very man who scheduled all the work crews for the power company. She would call him right now and get it done. She did, they moved the pole within three days, and we opened our school on time. That was not a coincidence. That was Jesus listening to the prayers of a few little old ladies in my Bible study, four Laborers and a preacher.

3. Jesus Has Risen to Teach Me (Gospel – That Christ teach the hearer to believe the resurrection, take comfort in that resurrection, rejoice in it, and bear witness to it.)

This sermon is really part of a series of sermons which will follow in the coming weeks. Jesus has risen from the dead. Yes, the first two weeks are really proclaiming the resurrection as the conquering of death, but there is another benefit to resurrection. Jesus is alive right now, and not just sitting on some gilded throne in heaven listening to the latest top 40 from the angelic choirs. He is actively and purposefully reigning and acting in my best interests and to my blessing.

When we walked the shores of Galilee with his disciples he was a master teacher. We read that in the Gospels. To no one's surprise then, he is still teaching today. In this Gospel reading we see the Lord encountering his disciples in their misconceptions and ignorance. He teaches them.

Listening to another teacher can be pretty problematic. When I start to let others tell me what is, what to do, what I am, I find myself in a whole pile of trouble. Jesus defines who I am, Jesus tells me what to do. Jesus defines reality for me.

Often times the presence of Christ is simply ignored on our part, or forgotten. Does this stand in the way of his teaching? He can surely teach us sometimes when we are not listening, he is still the teacher, but does he have to use much more blunt instruments in that situation? Do we find his lessons much more painful? Do we become dull and foolish students who don't turn in their papers on time?

In much of the world, perhaps not in America, to be a teacher is to hold a revered status. In India there are three individuals the culture expects you to treat like a "god." They are: your mother, the guest in your home, and your teacher. This may be a hard sell in a country where teenage rebellion is an expectation for our middle schoolers. The teachers in one of the local school districts here in Portland just voted to go on strike and I heard an interview with their union representative. He repeatedly said that their primary issue was not entirely pay but safety in the classroom. The teachers, facing classrooms of 45 middle schoolers, did not feel safe.

Jesus has risen to be our teacher. Our enemy here is ignorance and darkness. The disciples have spent the last three years with Jesus and they just don't get it. Our human nature is just thick about this. If you have ever, as I have, spent time trying to wrestle young people through the idea of Law and Gospel, Justification by Grace through Faith, you know how hard it is. If you were reading the papers I am reading right now you would know my frequent urge to hit the Scotch. (Sorry, all you oenophiles, this much bad theology simply requires a stronger remedy than what Zinfandel can provide.) As Isaiah once famously said, God's thoughts are not our thoughts and his ways are not our ways. We are not likely to get it on our own.

But we don't have to get this on our own. Jesus lives and reigns and teaches us. He opened the minds of his disciples that day and he opened our minds on Pentecost and the day of our Baptism. That what is means when we say the Spirit "enlightens" us. Jesus is, through the work of His Spirit, opening our minds too. He directs his disciples then and today to that event and that Spirit, the power from on High.

Look too at what Jesus does. He gets pretty basic. He does an object lesson, he eats some fish, proving that he was no ghost. This is not complicated stuff, this is not theological profundities of the incarnation here. This is a guy eating fish. This is the object lesson. Our darkness, our ignorance, our foolishness, all the things we do not know but need to know, this all has met its match. We have a risen Christ who is our master teacher. We might want to talk about being a student in a master teacher's class. What makes a teacher great? Jesus is better?

The preacher today wants to tell his people that Jesus cares very much about our education. He feeds our faith, he does not leave us helpless and tossed about (see Ephesians 4). He strengthens, feeds, nurtures, and teaches our minds so that we may think. It is the devil who says education is bad, for the ignorant are more easily deceived.

We have all had the experience of coming to a familiar text and finding something new. This Word of God is Him in a very real sense. He teaches us.

4. Practicing Righteousness (Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous – that the hearer would believe that Christ has filled his or her life with a real righteousness which is a manifestation of the resurrected Christ to this generation.)

Lutherans struggle a little with this concept. We like to say that we are declared righteous, but of course we know that we are really just spiritual and moral invertebrates who will undoubtedly betray our sinful nature sooner or later, so better you don't let your expectations get too high with us. John, however, is not going to let us sit there in our wormy nature today. It can be a terrible excuse for inactivity on our part and when it is that it is a fundamental denial of the resurrection. You see, we were baptized, said Paul, into his death so that we might rise with him to newness of life. There, I also tied this to Romans so you know it is a Lutheran sermon.

I think it is helpful for us in our Lutheran ethos that John says we practice righteousness. We are a work in progress but the good work which Christ began in our baptism (Philippians 1:6) is not yet done, but it is making some progress. Jesus makes the progress because the Jesus who rose from the dead and who is alive and ruling this universe at the right hand of the Father, is wielding that power for me blessing and good, and he is actively transforming my sinful life into a life which reflects the righteousness which he has given me. Of course the most obvious righteousness we can practice comes from the John reading last week. I don't have to get mad or even, I can forgive. It is not always easy and that old man sometimes really wants to get even, but I can forgive, and I can practice forgiveness. I am empowered by the righteousness of Christ to do that. I can love people with a holy love, a love which does not see them for what they can do for me, but simply as a person for whom Jesus died. It might take some time, I won't always get it right, but I can practice, and in that practice, the world will increasingly start to see Jesus in my life. I can pray, Jesus did after all, and I can practice the spiritual disciplines of silence and fasting and the study of the Word. I may not always be very good at them, but I can practice, and even get better at them, and through that discipline Jesus prepares me for the tasks to which he calls me. I can practice all sorts of righteousness, because I have been given righteousness, a righteousness which fills me with Jesus himself in this sacrament, at my baptism, in this Word and among these people. Perhaps most importantly, I can love you with Jesus love. I can start to see the righteousness of Jesus showing up in your heart, in your face, in your hands, in your whole life. I can encourage you, rejoice, forgive your failing, grow closer to you. Together we can practice righteousness, for we are righteous, as he is righteous. He has made sure of that.

5. (Someone, I don't know who, sent me this sermon three years ago when this text came up. I cannot properly credit it – but that will hardly stop me from sharing it)

Five Post-Easter Surprises

Luke 24:36-49

1. Reappearance - Reappear
2. Restoration - Restore
3. Reminder - Remind
4. Revelation - Reveal
5. Redirection - Redirect