



Immanuel Lutheran Church

Transcript from April 18, 2021 sermon preached by Rev. Tab Ottmers

Alleluia, Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

God's grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our Father, from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The text for our sermon this morning comes from the first reading from Acts. In the Easter season, instead of an Old Testament reading for the first reading, during the season of Easter, the church historically hears from the book of Acts. We read the effect that Easter had on the early church, and how the early church proclaimed the Word of God in its beginning. So, during the Easter season we kind of go back in time, to those first chapters of Acts, to see what the church did with this new message of the resurrection of Christ. And what we find in our reading from Acts three is, right after Peter and John heal a man, the man ran and clung to Peter and John, and everybody saw this miracle. And so that's the setting for Acts chapter three. Why it begins kind of in a strange way. It says, "while he clung to Peter and John," that was the man who was just healed. He was so thankful that he was healed, and that they did that miracle to him, and everybody was amazed.

And also, our Gospel reading. The sermon is going to be based on this particular verse. This is after Jesus was raised from the dead, Luke 24. And there in verse 45 and following, "Jesus opened their minds to understand the scriptures. He said to them, 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, beginning from Jerusalem." And that's kind of the the part we're really going to focus on this morning and hear is Jesus telling his disciples, well, now what? What do we do?

Because it would seem natural in our Gospel reading as Jesus--last week, we heard Jesus appeared to the disciples. Thomas wasn't there. He appeared to them flesh and blood. And then now again, we hear Jesus appears to them again--flesh and blood--and they're surprised. And so it might be natural, that the disciples wonder, "is this going to happen all the time now? When God's people gather together is Jesus just going to appear--flesh and blood?" And so this is the reason why Jesus teaches them what he does. He is saying, essentially, "no, I'm not going to appear to you in flesh and blood as I am right here right now. But I am going to be with you. And in fact, I'm going to be with you in an even more intimate and close way, through my word and sacrament." Because Jesus tells them, "now you are to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins in my name." That this is how Jesus is present with us. Through His word and sacrament. A new presence, a better presence. Because Christianity is not about a set of moral laws. Christianity is not about a certain type of government. It's not about a program.



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Christianity is about a man. A man who claimed to be God, and then showed himself to be God. Christianity is about a man who was raised from the dead. And he tells us he still comes to be with us. That is what Christianity is. And that should be the concern of every Christian. What is Christianity? Is Jesus really with us? Does he appear to be with us? How do we know that we are being given what we need? When Jesus says preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins, are we receiving--what Peter says in our reading from Acts--times of refreshing?

Now, in the last couple of generations, food packaging has become pretty important. It's become rather complex. It used to be about the only thing we cared about on food packaging was, well, the expiration date. Even then, if you're like me, when you look at the date stamped on the milk jug... It's more of a suggestion rather than a hard and fast rule. Pop the cap, smell it. Eh, close enough.

But now, if you've noticed, with more focus on diet, especially with various illnesses floating around everywhere and people caring about their health, now food packaging and ingredients, nutritional facts become like a dictionary on the back of food. We read more on the pack of a piece of bubblegum than our ancestors read in a month. Calories, sugar, trans fats, regular fats, country of origin, organic, free range, the list goes on. We've become very conscious about what we put in our bodies. Your life depends on it. Well, today Jesus tells us and the church and his disciples what should be on the wrapper for every sermon. Jesus tells us what we should be concerned about, not in food for our bodies. But are we receiving, like Peter said, times of refreshment? Are we being refreshed when we hear the Word of God? When we hear a sermon? What is it that should be in every sermon? Because that's what Jesus commands his disciples to do today. He tells them preach repentance, and forgiveness of sins in my name. I'm not going to be with you in flesh and blood, but I'm going to be with you in this way. Preaching repentance and forgiveness of sins. It should be the theme for every sermon, every Bible study, every time somebody opens the scriptures to teach. It's what Jesus says to do.

In verse 45, through verse 47, in our Gospel reading, you notice Jesus did two things. He opened the minds of the disciples to understand the scriptures. By scriptures, that means the Old Testament. And then he did something else. He instructed them on what the church has to do now that he's risen from the dead. "Preach repentance and forgiveness of sins in my name." It's that simple. No strings attached. No funny stories. No anecdotal tales told by a charismatic preacher. No super engaging movie clips to tell you what the gospel is like. No, Jesus makes it pretty easy for us preachers. "Preach repentance and forgiveness of sins in my name."

"Oh, but Jesus... people's diet now is so much different. Their attention spans are so much shorter now. In fact, Jesus, three people have probably already begun to let their minds wander, and I haven't even told one joke. Jesus, our society--we need fillers, entertaining stories. We need additional ingredients.



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Jesus, there's so many distractions. How can your word work? With computers, laptops, iPhones, iwatches, and good old-fashioned noticing that the person sitting in front of you has mismatched socks. Jesus, just preaching repentance and forgiveness of sins in your name? It sounds, well, it sounds like reading a nutritional label. Doesn't sound all that fun."

But here, Jesus isn't just giving us the bare essentials. Jesus is reminding the disciples and us that man does not live on bread alone, but every word which comes from the mouth of God. Jesus isn't teaching his disciples just to give little crumbs. But he is giving them what is essential to life as a Christian. The Word of God. And Jesus proves it. He reminds them. Jesus does this when he comes to them in person. He does this very thing. He says, "everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets and the Psalms." Jesus is the Word of God made flesh, even the Old Testament, it was about Jesus. The whole point of the Old Testament was Jesus. Essential to your eternal life, the one ingredient you cannot live without. Even before he was born, Jesus was the sole ingredient. The one most important part of a well balanced diet. Jesus, the Son of God.

There is no other need. No secondary dietary need. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. Without me, you can do nothing." Yet, how easy it is to starve ourselves. How easy it is to not care about the nutritional value of what we put in our ears. We're so willing to chase the fillers in life. But just imagine. Jesus could have told His disciples anything he wanted. Put yourself in their shoes. Jesus has risen from the dead, you see that he is true God, he's defeated everything. He has all wisdom, knowledge, and everything. What would you have asked him for? Jesus could have given them the winning lottery numbers. He could tell them the next best stock investment. He could tell them how to avoid getting sick, how to cure cancer, how to raise perfect children. But this is more important than all of that. Jesus says, "preach repentance and forgiveness of sins in my name."

More important than curing cancer. More valuable than any diet. This is not only for the disciples, but every person who opens the scriptures. Listen for what Jesus tells the disciples to preach--repentance and forgiveness of sins. If you don't hear repentance, you aren't being shown your sins. Then the preacher, he isn't feeding you. If the forgiveness of sins becomes just some added on secondary ingredient, well, you're not being fed. And my, how we look to find sustenance on the things of this world. We worship the created rather than rather than the Creator. We want the trans fats. We crave the artificial sweeteners. I'm talking spiritually. We want what money can buy. We chase the approval of people at the expense of remaining faithful to Christ. Just as easy as it is convincing yourself to go ahead and have another piece of dessert. Or, "might as well just finish all this Easter candy while I'm sitting here." Think about it. It doesn't really take much to convince us to sin. You don't have to try and gossip. You don't have to try and assume the worst about people. Nor do we have to tell ourselves to skip church and Sunday school.



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Yes, it's like we're addicted to sin. We have a taste for it and we hunger for it. Yet, after we've had our fill, after we've lost our temper, after we've sinned, after we maybe wish we hadn't spoken so harshly to our children, we just wish we were better examples of the Christian life. After we've gorged ourselves on sin, it doesn't feel so good. The times of refreshing that we hear about in our first reading, that's really what we need. Like that afternoon eating too much Easter candy, nothing good comes from sin. In fact, sin is a starvation of righteousness. Too often we lack discernment. Too often we don't know how to listen to God's Word or we completely forget what Jesus instructs us on today. To listen for repentance, to receive the forgiveness of sins.

Repentance and forgiveness of sins, it's so often last on the list. So often, instead of analyzing or listening to a sermon or a Bible study, our first concern is, "did it make me feel good?" Jesus mentions nothing of the sort. Repentance and forgiveness of sins. Listen for repentance, the law of God's Word, for the forgiveness of sins. The gospel of Jesus Christ was crucified for your sins. Raised for your justification. Look at Peter's sermon in our reading from Acts. He shows us that he learned the lesson from the Gospel reading. Peter goes straight for the meat and potatoes, no candy, no fluff. Why? Because Peter knows his audience his hearers, they're real sinners. Peter preaches repentance. He says, "you denied the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you." How often it is that, instead of choosing Jesus, we choose sin.

He goes on further, Peter says, "and you killed the author of life." Talk about preaching repentance. "But Peter, don't you know that according to all the latest church growth gurus and fancy preachers, you don't want to tell people about their sins. You don't want to upset them. Don't you know they might get sad, they might not come back?" But Peter, he learned his lesson from our Gospel reading. Peter knew what the people needed, and he knows what we need. He knew that the paralytic needed more than just a healing. He needed more than just working legs. Everyone needed repentance and forgiveness of sins, and you do too.

The very one that they sinned against, was doing the healing. If you notice, they all ran to Peter and they tried to grab them and begin to worship them. And the disciples they said, "no, it's not us who's doing this. It is the very one who you handed over to death." Jesus, he is still present. He is still doing the healing. But more important than healing in your physical body is the healing for your sins. The forgiveness of sins. "Repent, therefore," Peter says, "turn back that your sins may be blotted out. That times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." There it is the main ingredient. Peter points out to them, that the presence of the Lord is with them. That through the word and the forgiveness of sins, Jesus Christ is not gone. He's a man raised from the dead and is present with his people.

First he was on the cross. Where there he was starved. There he was starved of what he deserved. He deserved to be rescued. But the father left him there so that he wouldn't leave you. Jesus never fed



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himself on fluff nor sin. He never strayed. Yet he took your sins upon himself. He died on the cross for you. He's suffered the consequences of you indulging in your sin. Your hate, your anger, your impatience. Jesus takes it all. He ate it up, took it into himself. And now the sins of the world are gone. Yes, the news is that great.

Times of refreshing. Who of us wouldn't yearn for this? In a world that seems to have gone mad, times of refreshing sounds pretty good. Times of refreshing, we are told, from the presence of the Lord. Is the Lord with us? Is he, as he says in the word and sacrament, to give us times of refreshment? Indeed he is. And whoever says that the Lord's Supper or baptism is just symbolic, they miss the point of the refreshment of Christ. That Christ comes to be with us, to forgive us through His Word, to feed us himself in the sacraments of the altar. How refreshing is that? All the fake food we eat all the things we chase in life, money, power, retirement portfolio, perfect children, position on sports teams that might get us a scholarship. Jesus doesn't leave us with those things. Because he knows in the end, they're empty. Jesus appears and is with us through preaching of repentance and forgiveness of sins, to take away your failures. To take away your sins. To take away your death. To refresh you. To point you again and again to your baptism. To speak to you the words of life, the very words of God, not just bread and wine alone, but his body and blood to eat and drink.

How's that for an ingredients list? The body and blood of Jesus. The medicine of immortality. Yet, instead of Jesus being among us to eat something to prove he's real, he invites you to eat him. To partake of his very body and blood and live by faith. For that is righteousness. You are forgiven, restored, fed and nourished. Not so you can run back and indulge yourself in sin, but to heal you, to refresh you.

So, don't eat so much junk food. I'm talking about spiritual food. As you fight against that fifth doughnut, fight against sin. As you force yourself to eat that salad or celery, make God's Word part of a regular diet. Bible study, make that a priority. The Holy Spirit feeds you through repentance and forgiveness of sins. It's not terribly difficult. Pay attention to what you put in your ears. What do you feed your faith with?

Unlike a nutritional facts, label the scriptures, well, they're always clear. Through faith in Jesus, you'll live forever. You will never die. The presence of Christ brings you times of refreshment.

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