

30 April 2006
Easter 3

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Sent with the Word of Life”

Text: Acts 4:8-12; Luke 24:36-49; 1 John 1:1 – 2:2

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

This past Wednesday night, at about 7:45 pm, I was sitting in the chapel at our Ft. Wayne seminary, listening, as 65 men received their calls into the Holy Ministry and found out to which church they would be going. Family, friends, and classmates, were all jammed into the chapel, as the names and locations of the churches were read aloud. No two calls alike. One went to Montana, one to Brooklyn, NY. One was a sole pastor, another an associate, and another called to a dual parish. There was a call to a church in Hawaii, as well as some overseas missionary calls. It is an exciting night, to see, once again, the Lord answering our prayers to send laborers out into the harvest. To see these men, from every walk of life, formed by our Saviour and called by Him to proclaim His Gospel. To go where they are sent, and to speak what they are given to speak.

And in that sense, though all the calls were different, they were also all the same. For there is only one Office of the Holy Ministry, and only one purpose for that office, which we heard again this morning: ***“that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations.”*** That is what Jesus is all about, what the church is all about, what the apostles were all about, and what pastors should be all about. Salvation by grace through faith alone. Salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Salvation and eternal life through the forgiveness of sins. A message for all people, no matter where you are sent.

Which brings us to Peter and John, and the reading we heard today from the book of Acts. It was now about two months after Easter, and they had been going about their preaching in Jerusalem, at the Temple, and all seemed to be going well. Peter’s Pentecost sermon had converted some 3,000 people; and we read shortly after that ***“the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”*** (Acts 2:47) But then our Lord had in mind to send Peter and John to preach where probably they would never had gone if they had not been sent – not to Montana or Brooklyn! – *but to an even tougher assignment: to the Sanhedrin.* To Annas and Caiaphas and all those rulers and elders and scribes who had arrested Jesus and had seen to it that He was crucified. Those who had

hated Jesus with a perfect hatred. They now arrested Peter and John, and had them testify. Yet even when confronted with those murderous faces, full of hatred and malice, Peter and John do what they are sent to do, and speak what they are given to speak: the death and resurrection of Jesus, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Because even these Jesus wanted to forgive. He had said so from the cross: **“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”** And so that it might be, He sends His apostles to preach to them. And not just any apostles, but *the top two!* Peter and John. Even though before they hadn’t listened to John the Baptist, and they hadn’t listened to Jesus. But God gives up on no one. He wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Tim 2:4) And so He sends them His witnesses. He sends them His Word. That they might repent and believe. That they might live and not die. Even those who put Him to death.

Which is good! For that last group – *those who put Him to death* – that includes you and me. By our sins, nailing Him to the cross. Don’t just blame the Sanhedrin. There is an old spiritual that asks: *Were you there when they crucified my Lord?* Well, our sins were at least. And so Jesus’ **“Father, forgive them”** was meant also for us. That *we* might repent and believe. That *we* might live and not die.

And so that it might be for us, today our Lord has sent His apostles, Peter and John, to preach to us. And so we heard them. Sent to fill us with His Word, with His truth, with Him. That we no longer deceive ourselves. That we know the truth. And first is the truth of our sin. That is *not* a popular subject. Oh, we usually don’t mind admitting that we have done *some* sins; that we’ve fallen short here and there, and really ought to be doing better. We don’t mind putting together a list of things to work on – being a better spouse, not getting so angry, praying more, reading my Bible more, not being so rude, getting a handle on my sins . . .

But is that the truth? Maybe partly, but it’s not the whole truth. That simply won’t do. That’s not repentance. That’s not confession. For what is that, *really?* Is that not *you* confessing to yourself? Is that not *you* taking over the matter, and sorting things out, and trying to arrange for them? Self-improvement 101. . . . But that doesn’t work when you are *coram deo* – before God. Before the cross. For then there is no fudging, no softening. It is as He says it is. You: sinner. And we confess: yes, I am a sinner. Not that I have simply done some sins; I am a sinner. Yes, putting God on trial and questioning Him and His ways, just as the Sanhedrin. Praying *Thy will be done*, yet at the same time striving for my own. Putting no one else but *me* first. It is the truth. It is as Peter preached: ***this Jesus, whom you crucified.*** Yes.

But *this Jesus, whom you crucified* – Peter continues – **God raised from the dead**. The one who died is alive again. Which is not necessarily good news, unless you know that He did not come back seeking vengeance and retribution . . . *but to give forgiveness*. And so, Peter preaches this good news. That the work that Jesus began before, He is continuing to do now. Only now through the ones He sent with His Word. Peter and John did not raise up this man. **“By him this man is standing before you well.”** By Him, for He is alive and working, and giving life. He healed then and He is healing now. He preached then and He is preaching now. He raised the dead then, and He is raising the dead now. *The crucifixion only made things worse . . . or better!* For now there is not only One doing these things, but 12 – and soon, more. More preaching His Word. More preaching His death and resurrection. More preaching repentance and forgiveness of sins in His Name. More raising those dead in their sin through His Word of life. More, sent by Him, with His Word, that all might live. For that is why He came. That is why He bore our sin on the cross; that is why He died our death; that is why He broke the bonds of the grave – that we may live. That our sins may not *handled* by us, but forgiven by Him!

That was the purpose of Peter and John’s preachment, and that is the purpose of repentance – not only that we *know ourselves* in truth, but that we *know our Saviour* in truth. To know that **“if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”** To cleanse us. To create us in a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within us. To wash us in His blood, and breathe new life into us. To raise us from the death of sin, to the light and life of fellowship with Him. And truly it is He still working all of these things, *through* those whom He has sent. Through His Word of power and life.

And so just as Jesus came to His disciples on the night of that first Easter and said to them, **“Peace to you”** – so He is here today with that same peace. For to us He has sent His Word of peace and forgiveness. And His Word always does what it says. And so not just to His apostles, but now also *to us* He has sent the promise of the Father – His Holy Spirit, given to us in the waters of Holy Baptism. And here, while He does not eat before us, He gives us His body and blood to eat in Holy Communion. And He has clothed *us* with power from on high, as we are clothed with His forgiveness in His Absolution. And through these means, it is *Easter for us!* For through these means our sins are forgiven, we are raised from the dead, and we are given a new life. Not the old life, patched up! But a new life. That we might live *coram deo* – before God, not in fear, but in peace. And not just for a time, for ever.

Some 2000 years ago, 12 men were sent out to proclaim that Word, the Word made flesh, the Word of life. This past week, at least 65 more were sent. With the same Word, the

same life, the same power. And that is why we are here. For our Lord sent that Word to us. To us who were dead. To us who crucified the Lord of life. To us, filthy, rotten sinners who deserved nothing. ***By Him we stand here today, well.*** Forgiven. Cleansed. New. For He is alive and working, here, in us. That we may repent and believe. That we may live and not die. That we may know that Easter is not just one day, but every day; for Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds steadfast in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.