

26 April 2009
The Third Sunday of Easter

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Growing Children”

Text: Luke 24:36-49 (1 John 3:1-7; Acts 3:11-21)

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

Alleluia! Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!] Alleluia!

Easter is for children. Which means it is for us! Not because of the candy and bunnies and egg hunts of the world, but because Easter is about baptism, and baptism is where we are born anew as children of God. St. Paul tells us (Romans 6) that baptism unites us to Jesus' death and resurrection - to Good Friday and to Easter - so that we might *die with Him* to the life of sin, and *live with Him* the new life of grace. And so the church has always regarded Easter - and specifically the Easter Vigil - as the perfect time to have baptisms. And while we did not have any baptisms that night, in our Easter Vigil liturgy we remembered our baptism and rejoiced in the new life that God gave us then, and continues to give us now. And so we rejoice like St. John did today, when he proclaimed: **“what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.”** And so we are. Children of God, loved by God. In the beginning, now, and forever.

But if Easter is about baptism, then the weeks following Easter are about what that baptism means for us. How we *live* as children of God, and how we *grow* as children of God. Last week in the Introit, we sang: **“Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation.”** God desires us to be His children, but not to remain childish, but to grow up. To grow in faith, in love, in righteousness. Which doesn't mean growing away from God, but rather into Him. That we be like Him. Like Father, like son.

This growth began for the disciples that first Easter night. For as Luke tells us, they are gathered together, talking, and when Jesus appears to them they act, well, rather childish. Like the child who thinks there is a monster in the closet or under the bed, **they thought they saw a ghost.** But just as flesh and blood parents embrace their children and drive away their fears, so Jesus here in His flesh and blood embraces His children - and bids them embrace Him - and drives away their fears. He is no ghost, but the Son of God who has conquered death in His resurrection. But this children need to learn, and their faith grow and cling to. And so Easter night, Jesus comes into their room and calms their fears. He is alive and with them, and so

they have peace.

But what Jesus does next is just as important as this first giving of peace. Luke tells us: ***“Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.”*** Like the parent who after embracing her child opens the closet to show him that there are no monsters, or who kneels and shows her that there is nothing under the bed, so Jesus next opens the Scriptures to show His children the truth - the truth of His Word. That what happened the past few days was no accident, no series of unfortunate events, and not things spinning out of control - but what had been prophesied and spoken of all through the Scriptures. How everything that had been written spoke of and pointed to Him and His Easter work.

And so Jesus opened the Scriptures to them and filled their minds with the truth. He told them about the cross and Isaac’s burden of wood in Genesis. He told them about His Supper and the flesh and blood of the passover lamb in Exodus. He told them about His atonement for sin and the sacrifices in Leviticus. He told them about His laying down His life for the life of the world like Samson gave his life for the people in Judges. He told them about the hatred and villainy He and a former King of Israel - David - received, even from their own people. He told them about the being pierced from Zechariah as He showed them His hands and side. He told them how He was Isaiah’s Suffering Servant. And with each teaching, each story, each shadow revealed, their fears were taken away and their faith increased. The monsters of uncertainty and the ghosts of sin were taken away, and replaced with the Spirit and Word of God.

Oh, they were still children! They would always be children, just as we will always be. But they were learning as they drank the pure spiritual milk of the Word, and growing up to and into their salvation - who was speaking to them and not only informing, but forming, them.

And that distinction is important. That the Word of God not only *in*forms us, but also *forms* us. For being a child of God is not simply a matter of the head, but of the heart. Of life that is not just known, but lived. Perhaps we have too often put asunder these two things that God has joined together. The Word of God became flesh. And He still does, as He now comes and lives in and through us. And so we will live who we are; who we have been made in our baptism. That is what John means when he goes on to talk about the ***“practice of sinning”*** and the ***“practice of righteousness.”*** That is not simply of matter of *knowing* what is right and wrong, or of will power and determination to follow the Law. It is a matter of *being*. That born anew as children of God, we no longer follow the false promises and lies of the devil - which is what sin is! - but instead, follow the true and sure promises of God, and finding our life in Him. *Practicing righteousness* by repenting of our sin and abiding in His forgiveness and love, and thus growing into Him.

Do we always do that? No! We're children, after all, and we often act like children, don't we? Being rebellious, wanting junk food instead of good food, thinking we know better than our Father, listening to and following other voices and so-called wisdom in this world. And what happens is that our **minds** get filled with all kinds of junk - truths, half-truths, falsehoods, superstitions, fantasies, myths, legends, theories, and all the latest fads and trends; and our **lives** get filled with all kinds of sins, hurts, struggles, and wanderings - and we become such a mixed-up jumble that satan loves to manipulate, raising doubts, resurrecting fears, and putting monsters and skeletons back in our closets!

And so how good to know that our Saviour continues to come to us in the night of sin with the light of His grace, and give us what we need - Himself! Still chasing our monsters and forgiving our sins and giving us peace. He opens our minds to clean out the junk and fill them with His Word of truth. He opens our hearts to clean out the junk and fill them with His love. He opens our mouths and puts into them the good food that we need - His own body and blood, to feed and strengthen us as His children. That if we have acted in ignorance and unbelief, if we have rebelled and followed our own ways, if we have doubted and went along with the world, we do so no more! But do as Peter preached in his sermon shortly after Easter, and as we heard in the reading from Acts: that we ***“repent . . . and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.”***

Mark well those words - that our refreshing comes ***“from the presence of the Lord.”*** He doesn't just send it, He comes and brings it. He comes Himself to us. To embrace us, forgive us, heal us, baptize us, raise us, feed us, teach us, and keep us. He does this through means - through people and things; through Ministry, Word, and Sacraments - but through these people and things, it is no ghost, but our Lord Himself. The Good Shepherd caring for His sheep. The Father keeping His children. Our Saviour-brother with us still.

And so ***“beloved,”*** as St. John told us, ***“we are God's children now.”*** His baptismal promise and faithfulness is sure. What He has given to us He will not take back. What He has done for us He will not undo. And what He has promised He will deliver. So let us not fear, but grow up in our salvation, growing into our Saviour. Let us taste and see that the Lord is good. And let us abide in Him who is alive for us. For yes, Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed!] And is here for us. Alleluia! Alleluia!

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

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