

11 May 2011
Easter 3 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Repent and Be Refreshed”

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

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

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. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead.

Do you think Peter felt like a hypocrite? Here he is, standing in the Temple and preaching to the people gathered there *about denying the Lord*. Twice he says: you denied him, you denied him. Yet it was only about two months before this that Peter stood in those uncomfortable shoes. When he, the fearful coward, denied knowing Jesus three times. Who was Peter to lecture anyone about denial! I wonder if he was thinking of that even as he spoke these words. For if he's anything like me, and if you're anything like me, it's *those* memories that tend to stick in your mind. Not the good things, but the things you wish you could do over and change - those are the things that stick.

But no, Peter is not being a hypocrite here - rather, he is preaching from experience; as one who has been in their place. As one who knows that even greater than his denials and the pain that came with them, is the joy of forgiveness. It is the joy he wants these people to have, too. But to receive that forgiveness, the Law first has to do its work, as it did with him when that rooster crowed. How devastated he had been! They must be convicted, too. For then the wonderful Gospel can do its work. And so after preaching about their denial, he then says: ***Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.***

Perhaps some in the crowd wondered if they could ever be forgiven. Peter knows they can. For, he says, *they* at least acted in ignorance. That doesn't excuse them - sin is still sin! *But how much worse was his sin!* He wasn't ignorant. He knew full well who Jesus was. He had confessed it with his own lips: ***You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*** (Matt 16:16). He was one of Jesus' chosen ones; one of His closest followers. And he had denied. But there was forgiveness for him! And if for him, then for them. If for him, then for all.

And so his sins had been blotted out, and he had received times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. And though Jesus had now ascended into heaven, He was not therefore gone - no, He is still present, now through the preaching of His Word and the giving of His Sacraments. To forgive, to refresh, to restore, to strengthen. That is what the prophets wrote. That is why Jesus came, died on the cross, and rose from the dead. And that is why Jesus sent Peter to preach. That all may repent. That all may turn. That the sins of all may be blotted out to live, now, in peace and joy.

This is the forgiveness now proclaimed to you. To you who have denied the Holy and Righteous one with your unholy and unrighteous lives. To you who have crucified the Author of life with your sins, and your trying to be the author of your own life. To you who sometimes act in ignorance, but often know full well the sin you do. Repent, for the presence of Jesus is here to blot out your sins. However great, however frequent, Jesus is not here to condemn, but to forgive; He is not here to weary you, but to refresh you. That you may have the joy and confidence of Peter. That you may know how great the love of God for you; His love that takes sinners like you and me, and makes us His children.

That's what John - who was with Peter that day in the Temple - wrote, and that we heard tonight: ***See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.*** So we are. Present tense, indicative; a statement of fact. That is who you are. You are no longer a sinner, a denier, or an enemy in God's eyes. But because you have been baptized into the Good Friday death and Easter resurrection of Jesus, and given His promised Spirit of power, holiness, and life, you are a new person, a new creation, a child of God. A child born of God and now refreshed by God, that the life He has given be sustained and kept. And so He gives you the living water of His Word and Spirit. He feeds and strengthens you with His Body and Blood. That each day you repent and be forgiven. That each day you be refreshed by Him. That each day you live not according to the old man, the old ways; but according to the new man, in new ways. In ways of righteousness and holiness, all the days of your life.

Like Peter. Oh, he still sinned, just as you and I still sin. For though forgiven, we still live in our sinful human nature. And the Scriptures tell us stories of how Peter still stumbled and fell in confusion and fear. Yet even though sin still clings to us, something has changed. And what has changed is that Christ has risen. Truly, that changes everything. Our sin has been paid for, the bonds of the grave have been burst, and satan has been defeated. Yes, that changes everything! We see that change in Peter, and it is the same change that our Lord would perform in you. It is not what you do, but *His work in you*. That we may live as His children. Like Father, like Son. Like Father, like His sons and daughters.

So just as the Word of God from the lips of Peter and John made a lame man walk,

so may the Word of God today give us legs to walk in His ways, hands to do His works of mercy, and hearts to love as He loved. That we who have received the forgiveness and refreshing of the Lord, proclaim it now to all the earth. Not as hypocrites, but as those who know the despair and pain, who have received the joy of forgiveness, and who now live a new life.

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.