

10 April 2016
Easter 3

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Let’s Go to the Video”

Text: John 21:1-14; Acts 9:1-22; Revelation 5:1-14

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

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

It seems as if everything these days is somehow, somewhere, on video. Whenever something happens, it’s either on someone’s cellphone, a surveillance video, a dashboard camera, or now body cameras. This can be put to good use - many crimes are being solved these days because of this technology. But it can also be bad - just ask the candidates running for president. Every misstep or misstatement is captured and played back over and over again by their opponent. To sear it into the public’s mind, that this is what this person is all about. So don’t vote for them. You can’t possibly vote for them. See?

But I don’t think this is a new thing. Oh, in one sense, it is. The advancement of technology has brought us to this point. But in another way, this is nothing new. It is a tool that Satan has been using for a very long time. Because if you’re like me, he keeps replaying the videos of your sins in your mind. Over and over again. He doesn’t want you to forget all the mistakes you’ve made, all the regrets, all the shortcomings and failures. For me, it is those things that I’ve done, or failed to do, as a father, a husband, a son, a pastor. Those things which, if I could go back and do it again, I’d want to do differently. And wish I could.

But I can’t, and even if I could, I know that I’d either fail in the same way again or in a new and spectacularly different way. Satan has all the evidence he needs about how I’ve failed as a Christian and in my callings, my vocations . . . and he loves to keep replaying it all for me, reminding me. Things that other people know; things that no one else knows. Little things, big things. See? he says. Remember? *Let’s go to the video . . .*

So I’m thinking if it’s like that for me, and it’s probably like that for you, then it probably was like that for the disciples as well. Jesus, risen from the dead, appeared to the eleven. We heard that last week. They saw Him, His hands and side, and He ate with them. It was no ghost; Jesus really was risen from the dead. They should have been happy! And they were . . . But the video . . . it kept playing in their minds. **Peter’s** video was of his denials - oh, how he wished he could go back and do *that* again. For **Thomas**, it was his

doubting. What kind of disciple was he? **Nathanael** was the one who said: *Nazareth? Can anything good come out of Nazareth* (John 1:46)? Stupid! **James and John** were the ones who wanted the two seats of honor at Jesus' right and left. Had they really had the nerve to ask for that? And though we're not told who the other two disciples were who were with them that day we heard about in the Gospel today, I'm sure they had their own regrets and failures they were kicking themselves over as well . . . playing over and over . . . So, ***I am going fishing***, Peter says. Maybe that would get his mind off these things. And ***we will go with you***, the others said.

And ***that night they caught nothing***. Failures as disciples, failures as fishermen.

But just as Jesus had come to them three years before, so He comes to them again. And He provides for them again. And this story of Him doing so that we heard today is so full of reminders - *videos of the past!*

First, was the day Jesus had called them to be fishers of men. They'd been out fishing that night, too, and like this night had caught nothing (Luke 5). Then Jesus told them to let the nets down on the other side of the boat, and just like this morning, the fish came to them. It was like an instant replay.

Then when Peter got to the shore and Jesus, there is a charcoal fire going. They say that the sense of smell is the greatest memory trigger - well guess what Peter was warming himself around in the courtyard of the high priest not so many days before this (John 18:18), when all he could do was deny, deny, deny? Think smelling the charcoal was making that video was flash back in his mind?

And then Jesus feeds them - bread and fish. Just as He had fed the 5,000 (Matthew 14), and then the 4,000 (Matthew 15) . . .

It's almost as if nothing had changed, yet everything had changed. *They* hadn't changed; they were still sinners. Those memories were alive and well. And in a sense, Jesus hadn't changed - He was still doing the things He had done before. Yet He had changed, too. *He had died and risen from the dead!* But He would still be here for them. He still loved them, wanted them. He still had compassion for them and forgave them. And though they might not know what to do, He did. And they needed to learn: it was not *their* faithfulness, not *their* obedience, not *their* success, not *their* dedication that makes the difference - but Jesus'. He did it, for them. And He still would. Forgive them, raise them, and use them.

And so it was for the other apostle we heard about today as well - Saul. We heard the story of his conversion, how Jesus came to him while he was on his way to arrest and persecute more Christians. But as Jesus let him know - when you persecute them, you are really persecuting Me. For they are Mine, members of My body. So what you do to them

you do to Me. So Saul is struck blind. He can see nothing and he can do nothing. They lead him into the city of Damascus where for three days he sits in darkness, praying. For three days he sits in darkness, with (I'm sure!) the videos in his mind replaying over and over all that he had done. All the persecution, all the evil, all the faces of those people he had arrested and hauled off to jail. So what do you think he was praying for? In a moment of time he had gone from Saul the strong leader to Saul the weak and helpless. From the Saul the zealot to Saul the fearful. From Saul the successful to Saul the one who needed mercy.

And mercy is exactly what Jesus had come to give him. Saul could do nothing, but Jesus had come to give him everything. And so He sends Ananias to preach to him, baptize him for the forgiveness of his sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit, and feed him. Jesus gives him and the others a new video to play in their minds - not of their sins and failures and regrets, but of His triumph and forgiveness.

And that's the video He has for you as well. We might not be able to stop satan from replaying those horrible videos in our minds, that show us how sinful and unworthy and unqualified we are to be Christians, but every week we come back to this place and hear and see something else. *New* images put into our minds. That like the disciples, we learn that is not *our* faithfulness, not *our* obedience, not *our* success, not *our* dedication that makes the difference - but Jesus'.

And that's the image we were given today in the reading from Revelation. ***Who is worthy***, the cry goes out, ***to open the scroll and break its seals? And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able*** - or in other words, no one, anyplace, in all creation, is worthy. Not one. And satan has the videos to prove it. . . . But then, look! ***Behold! The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered*** . . . And what is seen? A Lamb standing, as though it had been slain. But it's not slain, dead, and lying on the ground or on an altar. It is standing. Living. Bloody? Yes. Pierced? Yes. But living. And then the words - the same words we sang earlier in the liturgy this morning, our song joining the song of heaven - ***Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!***

That's the video satan doesn't want you to see or hear and so will try to keep you away from this place and keep it out of your mind. And so he'll keep replaying your videos and reminding you that *you're not worthy, you're not worthy*. And He's right. But here is the One who is worthy. Worthy for you and here for you. To mercy you, absolve you, wash you, cleanse you, and raise you with Himself. To give you who are unholy His holiness. To give you who are unworthy His worthiness. To give you who are dead His life. To give us who are spiritual orphans His Sonship. That no matter what your past, no matter what your video shows, in Him, you have a glorious future.

And so like that day with the disciples, He invites us and all who are unworthy sinners to

come to His Supper and be fed by Him. To receive all this, not by eating bread and fish, but His Body and Blood. Or as Saul would later write: *as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes* (1 Cor 11:26). Or in other words, you replay the video of His death and resurrection! His death and resurrection for you, in your place. The video of His glorious victory for you. *That* is the video He wants you to see, over and over again. The Lamb who was slain, but who has now begun His reign as your merciful, compassionate, baptizing, absolving, feeding Lord.

So while satan may keep replaying the video of your sins over and over in your mind, know this: that video's been erased in heaven. Those sins and videos no longer exist in Christ. They've been erased with His blood and buried in His tomb. So Peter's denials? Forgiven. Thomas' doubting? Gone. Saul's persecution? What persecution? And your sins? *Separated from you as far as the east is from the west* (Psalm 103:12).

So Easter means you have a glorious future, now and forever. You've been set free from the past. So now all those videos you have . . . of other's sins against you, of their failures, of how they've let you down, of revenge plotted, giving them a taste of their own medicine . . . you gonna let them drag you back to a past you've been set free from? Drag you back to bitterness and sin, to death and the grave? Or is it time to erase those videos too? To forgive and set them free, too? To hit delete and rejoice in the life you now have in Christ, and which is for them as well? You know the answer. To forgive, to be forgiven, to live without fear, *that's the joy of Easter*. The joy of our risen Saviour, for you, and for all. The joy that enables us to proclaim that Christ is risen! [*He is risen indeed! 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.