

Preaching Copy: 1 Peter 1:22-25 “Stay with Us-Now and Forever”

3rd Sunday of Easter

Sunday, April 23rd, 2023

Text: 1 Peter 1:22-25

²² Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, ²³ since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; ²⁴ for “**All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls,** ²⁵ but the word of the Lord remains forever.” And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

The text’s intent

Call our hearts and minds away from living lives based on the hopes, dreams, and way of life of the world, which is fading and perishing, and instead focus on the living hope we have through faith in Jesus Christ. He paid the ransom price not with riches of this world that have no lasting value, but by His precious blood, the perfect spotless Lamb of Sacrifice, powerful enough to redeem us from the fruitless pursuits of the world that have no lasting value. Through our baptism, we have been made precious children of the Heavenly Father. As such we are called to live in obedience to His call to be holy, as He is holy. We cannot do that on our own, but by the obedience of faith, trusting that Jesus has done all that is necessary to make us holy and through repentance, which is the ongoing work of the Spirit to keep us holy we join with the Spirit in the work of purifying our souls. By that work we can have relational love with our brothers and sisters in Christ and grow in a sacrificial and unconditional love for one another just as God has for us. That living hope trusts in the God who fulfilled all the promises He made in the Old Testament through His Son, culminating in Him raising Him from death to everlasting life. Through Christ we are born again to a new life, filled with the living hope that though our bodies perish in this world, we too will be raised imperishable according to the promise of God’s Word, that has come to us in baptism and remains in us forever.

Focus Statement:

Jesus came alongside those disciples on the road to bring to them the truth of God’s Word, He does the same with us in our baptism through the Gospel Message, that through His life, death, and resurrection we are ransomed from our futile existence hoping in earthly things and instead made to be children of the Heavenly Father, hoping and trusting in His continued work through the abiding Spirit to purify our souls and keep us hoping in the resurrection victory to come.

Function Statement:

Why it’s important to know:

The disciples on the road to Emmaus were broken and dejected, because their hope in an earthly Messianic king appeared to be dead. When we center our lives and hope on earthly things, we too will find ourselves dejected and broken, as none of these things will last or bring true happiness.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Allow Jesus Spirit to come alongside us through Word and Sacrament, keeping us in repentance focused on living a new life in Christ, filled with hope and assurance that the relationship we have with Him now, will not fade, but will continue to grow as we walk with Him into life everlasting.

Subject Sentence: Christ’s resurrection promise abides unto Eternal Life

Introduction

Picture if you will, two men walking down a dusty road in the late afternoon. They walk rather slowly, talking and discussing something important as they walk. Although it's a beautiful spring afternoon, with the flowers blooming, the birds chirping, the meadows of green grass stretched out before them, making it all look very glorious, they are oblivious to this whole sight. Not even the sun shining and the warm breeze blowing lifts their spirits. They walk with their hearts and heads cast down. You see, all that they hoped for, all that they dreamed about, the sure and certain future they had envisioned a week ago had come crashing down.

Perhaps you know how they feel, those two men. Perhaps you've experienced one of those times in your life when what you hoped for and dreamed of has come crashing to an end. Maybe it was when a business venture failed. Or maybe it was when you retired, and you were left wondering what life was supposed to be about now. Maybe it was the passing of a loved one, and the life you enjoyed with them was cut short. Maybe it was a time when you encountered serious health issues that made you wonder what the future now has in store for you. A time when you felt lost, useless, wondering what is the point of going on. If you can relate to any of these times in your life, you can relate to the two disciples in our Gospel Lesson walking on the road to Emmaus.

Lost and Dejected on the Road to Emmaus

What if you were able to walk along with them down that road? What if you were able to come up and join them, and ask, "What's going on? Why are you two so down in the dumps?" What might they say? Maybe something like this:

"We came to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. But more than that we came to see Jesus of Nazareth. We were there when He who rode into the city just a week ago. The crowd was calling out "Hosannah, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" We joined in with them, waving palm branches, laying them and our cloaks down before Him as He rode in on a donkey. Do you know what all this meant? We were acclaiming Him to be the promised Messiah! We, along with that crowd, believed Him to be the Promised One, sent by God, to reign and rule a restored kingdom of Israel from Jerusalem. We envisioned Him kicking out the Romans and freeing us once and for all from their oppressive rule.

And why wouldn't we believe Him to be the One? He taught the truth of God from Scripture like no one had before, going beyond how the other rabbis taught. He taught with an authority from God Himself. He didn't just repeat what Moses and the prophets wrote, He explained it and expounded on it in keeping with what all the Scriptures attested to. And did you see and hear how God had worked mighty miracles and signs through Him? He could heal any disease and sickness. He could cast out demons with an authority that could only come from God. And did you hear what He did to Lazarus of Bethany? That man had been dead for four days; dead and rotting in the tomb. And Jesus raised him back to life by simply calling out to him saying, "Lazarus! Come Out!" If that's not a man with Messianic power than I don't know who is. We followed Him, believing Him to be the One. And what better time for Him to ascend to the throne than at Passover, our celebration of God by His mighty power freeing our ancestors from slavery in Egypt and calling us to be His people, the nation of Israel, and giving to us the gift of the Promised Land; this land that has been under foreign rule for far too long. If you had seen all this, you too would've believed Him to be the Messiah king we had waited for.

But three days ago, all that came crashing down upon our heads. The dream and hope for the restored kingdom of Israel ended when our own religious leaders, who were called to watch for and greet the Messiah when He appeared, tried and found Jesus to be a false Messiah, a blasphemer. They arrested Him and turned Him over to the Romans, who found Him guilty of being an insurrectionist and sentenced Him to death in the most horrible manner ever, crucifixion. But in all this we were waiting for Him to show the power that we believed He had to stop it. We were waiting for Him to save Himself from this sentence of death and then save us from the tyranny of Rome. Instead, we saw Him hung upon that cross, disfigured and bloody almost beyond recognition. We heard the jeers and insults hurled at Him by the religious leaders, the Roman soldiers, and the passersby, saying, "If you are really the Messiah, come down from the cross!" But He never did. He hung there until just before sundown when He died. We watched the soldier shove that sword into Jesus' side proving that He was dead. And with that, our hope that this Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah died just as He had.

And to make matters worse, just before we left Jerusalem this morning, some women who were also followers of Jesus came back from the tomb with a disturbing report that the stone had been rolled away and Jesus' body was gone! And they said that they had seen a vision of angels who told them He was alive! Two of His chosen Twelve, Peter and John, ran to the tomb and found it empty, just as the women had said. But of course, they did not see Him raised. He may have been able to raise Lazarus from the dead, but who left on earth could raise Him? This was all too much. We had to leave. Now we are wondering what does all this mean. And what are we to do now? We gave up our lives to follow Him, and all we hoped for has come to an end!"

Yes, perhaps you can relate to the desperation, the anguish, and the fear in their voices. But can you also relate to what happens next?

Jesus Comes Alongside them

As they are walking and talking, a stranger comes alongside them. And they tell him all that they have just told you. But this is no ordinary stranger, no ordinary man. This is the resurrected Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah sent by God. And He has come to them in their fear and misery out of His great love for them, to show them how instead of everything being over, their new life has just begun. They don't realize it yet, but God Himself has come to them to give them the living hope that only He can give.

This stranger guides them through the Scriptures and shows them how Jesus of Nazareth's death and resurrection were always the saving plan and will of God Himself. That blood of the Passover Lamb that the first celebrants of Passover painted onto the wood of their doorposts, the power that blood had to make the angel of death pass over came from the blood of Jesus that was poured out on the wood that was His cross. In fact, the reason that all the blood from the animals of sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem had the power to bring forgiveness of sins was only because they pointed to and drew their power from the final sacrifice, the death of the one John the Baptist pointed to and identified as "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." And just as Isaiah said **in Isaiah 53:4-6** ⁴ **Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.** ⁵ **But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.** ⁶ **All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.** Isaiah was prophetically pointing to the death of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. He shows them how repeatedly Scripture witnessed to the Messiah's death as necessary for the saving work the Father would send Him to do.

He tells them that this Jesus of Nazareth gave up His own life to pay the ransom price for the sins of the whole world. And that, just as He promised, He rose again from the dead so that they, and all people might know that the price has been paid, the Father's wrath over sin has been taken care of, and through Him eternal life awaits for all. Jesus turns them from focusing on just the trials and losses of the present, to see the whole picture of God addressing their greatest needs now and for eternity. And then, so they might know all that He has told them is true, He reveals Himself to them as that resurrected Messiah, Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God.

Jesus Comes Alongside You

Jesus has come alongside you too when the Holy Spirit came to be truly present with you in baptism. His Spirit brought to bear on your heart and mind the Word of the Lord that remains forever, the Good News, the Gospel Message that tells you how everything Jesus did in His life, death, and resurrection was for you.

He comes to you in the very midst of your sorrow, your fear, your depression, and your anguish, in order to refocus your vision just as He did those disciples on the road to Emmaus. He tells you in **1 Peter 1:24** **“All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls.** And not just the flesh, but everything associated with this world as well as our human existence. All the things that we lose in this world, all the things that come to an end are as temporary as the grass and the flowers. Even our very bodies and our health. In this world we are mortal and will not last forever.

But there is a greater, more glorious truth He has for you. **1 Peter 1:23** **Since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.** In your baptism you have been born again, born again to a new and living hope, through the living and abiding word of God. These are the words of absolute truth that tell you that you have been redeemed from the greatest hopelessness of eternal death. This living and abiding word of God changes you, making your soul, that part of you that is who you really are, who you were created to be, imperishable. So that the worst that this world and the devil can do to you, the worst that can be thrown in your face, which is death in this world, is not the end. You have been born again to a new life lived with the Spirit of your Lord and Savior now. He comes to you and walks with you through all those troubling times, using them to refocus your hope and faith away from the things of this world, and instead upon Him, the One who is the Lord and Ruler over all things in the Universe. He uses them to draw you away from trusting in yourself or the things of this world, and instead trust and hope is in Him alone, That you would place your faith in His abiding word, the Word that is the Gospel, that points to Him as the One who will never leave you, but continues to work on you and within you.

He comes to give you the faith you need to see yourself as Resurrection people and abides/remains in you to keep you in that faith. Your life has forever been changed by the truth that Jesus rose again to declare that He paid the ransom price for your soul in full. And because He did, His resurrection is your future. On the day of resurrection, when He returns, with the same voice of command that called Lazarus out of the tomb, but with far greater result, He will call you to rise from the grave. Your body, no matter how badly it has decomposed, even if it was cremated, will be brought back together, reformed and made new. It will be better, healthier, and stronger than it ever was in this life. It will be made perfect. And so will your soul; all traces of sin and guilt will be forever gone. And in that perfection, you will live in the New Heaven and New Earth for eternity. It is the place where Jesus promises to us that all that we have lost in this world will be more than replaced. It's the place where all we will have and hold will be imperishable, just as we are. And all those we know and love who died in faith will join us in this eternal paradise.

Conclusion

This is the word of the Lord that remains forever, the living and abiding word of God, given to you in His Word and His Sacraments. This is the word He brings to you as you walk down the dusty roads of this world. This is the word you need to hear as you mourn all of the things of this world that fade like grass in your life. This is the word you need to hear when your loved ones leave you in death. This is the word you need to hear when you face your own mortality. When this world ends, it is not THE END. There is a more glorious future to come. And while you walk down the dusty roads of this life you need not despair. You do not walk them alone. Jesus walks with you, His real presence in Your heart and mind through the Spirit that came to you in baptism, that continues to come and speak to you in His Word, and through His real presence in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. He is at work now through His words of Law and Gospel, to purify your faith, so that it rests solely in Him. He continues to do this work now and will continue until resurrection day to come. Amen.