

April 28, 2019

St. John 20:19-23: ***“This Is For Sinners Only!”***

I. Locked In.

II. Given What We Need.

III. Still the Same.

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Dear Friends in Christ,

It has been stated, "Human reason is never the measure of sin's severity." (Michael P. Barrett, *Faith For The Family*, Feb. 77, p. 17) It's amazing, isn't it? Everybody says it: "We all make mistakes." Everybody says it: "Nobody's perfect." But ask everybody to confess, "I, a poor miserable sinner...(who) justly deserves your present and eternal punishment." Try that and see what happens. Try taking that road with family and friends who demand that God loves those who give it their best. I'm talking about our family and friends who harbor a lot of secret thoughts they want to keep that way, or those who ride the waves of gossip and slander, or...! And then there's us. Hmm... "Human reason is never the measure of sin's severity."

Well, with all that in mind, here we are still in the Day of Resurrection. John writes, "On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were together..." (v. 19) If you back up to the first verse of John 20 we're told, "Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb."

From morning to evening. What a day this had been for these brothers and sisters of the past. Nothing made sense. And, now, a most glorious confrontation was about to take place. A confrontation that would bring into juxtaposition the significance of confessing, "I, a poor miserable sinner" with the meaning of Christ's Resurrection.

THIS IS FOR SINNERS ONLY!

I. Locked In.

"On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews..." How many times have we been here; considered the reality these people faced: "doors being locked...for fear."? I never tire of making this visit. I never tire of hearing "the doors locked for fear". It sounds like life, doesn't it? Locking the doors. Shutting out everything!

And you can't help but think of the once strong commitment of the disciples and their insistence that they would be faithful unto death. Peter's words, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will." (Matt. 26:34) And right after that: "...all the other disciples said the same." (Matt. 26:34)

It's quite a list of events. His closest companions deny Him. One betrays Him and then hangs himself. Then they all hide. Doors locked. Now what? It's the way of the flesh, isn't it? One moment willing and determined. The next, a kick in the stomach and everything falls apart. Oh, man, the changes that change brings.

Most rebel at the confession, "I, a poor miserable sinner". But the "poor" and "miserable" part have a way of catching up with us. I'll tell you this: That quote I put in front of us at the beginning of the sermon screams out: "Human reason is never the measure of sin's severity." People might not like to admit their sin. We're living in a time when the only real sin is calling sin what it is. What sin is and what it does forms the heart of what makes us "poor" and "miserable". We see it in our lives individually. We see it in a decaying culture.

II. Given What We Need.

"Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord." (vv. 19b-20). Well, this is how it works. Those paralyzed with guilt, sin and fear don't run after Jesus. Jesus comes for them. Where they are. You know, it's what Jesus said: "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Lk. 19:10). Listen again as Jesus says, "Peace be with you." Fears suddenly removed by His Presence. Sin forgiven. Guilt taken away. Again, "Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord." (v. 20).

No doubt about it, it's the most despised word in any language, but it is the word that answers all the questions about why humans do what humans do to one another, why the afflictions that take away our strength and the age that steals away our youth - answers all questions about all things that lead to the grave. The word is **sin**. It has brought death and hell into our lives. But it is our resurrected Jesus Who stands before us and says, "Peace be with you". He comes to where we are. He meets with us in the Word, in our Baptisms, and in His Supper to love and heal.

Listen to this from God's Word: "(Jesus) was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification." (Rom. 4:25) Do you see it? How they're connected? Delivered up to death because of our sin. Then, "raised to life for our justification." It's the golden thread that runs through all Scripture. I ask you to listen carefully to this definition of justification from the book, "A Summary of Christian Doctrine":

...it is a judicial act of God...by which God in mercy for Christ's sake absolves (the sinner) from all sins, pronounces and declares him righteous, who has no righteousness of his own, but who trusts in the righteousness of the Savior... 'The word "justify" means in this article to absolve, that is, to declare free from sin.' (Edward W. A. Koehler, *A Summary of Christian Doctrine*, Concordia Publishing House, pp. 149,150)

Easter, post Easter, everything about Scripture addresses the most despised word in every language: **SIN**. Paul writes what we well know, "And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain." (I Cor. 15:14) And then this: "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins." (I Cor. 15:17) **You are still in your sins**. The very resurrection of Christ is the on-going assurance that God declares us free from sin's condemnation, though we still battle with the sin in us.

And listen to this from Scripture: "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life." (that is, His resurrection!) (Rom. 5:10) Christ's life, suffering, death and resurrection have everything to do with the word that offends this world; everything to do with all imperfections, all sorrows, all decay, every death and eternal separation from God.

Well, listen to this . . .

III. Still the Same.

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." (vv. 21-23)

There are two things about these closing words from our text we must note. First and again, Jesus said, "Peace be with you." Again, He is absolving these men of their sin and guilt. Secondly, He says, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." This is a key Scripture that confronts us with what we call "The Office of the Keys" which is, as defined in Luther's Small Catechism, "...that special authority which Christ has given to His church on earth (that's us) to forgive the sins of repentant sinners, but to withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant as long as they do not repent."

It's been a good 12 years ago when I shared with you a moment when I watched a televangelist prancing across the stage connecting his theological dots. I'm paraphrasing only a few words in the following sentences, but I guarantee that the paraphrase is quite accurate: "If you're born again then you live a new life in Christ. A new life! There's no reason for poverty!" In other words, according to this theology, Jesus' confrontation with the fearful disciples was to deliver them from earthly poverty.

Several months ago, a couple of our members told me about a present day televangelist who is offering free miracle water to those who request it; free, of course, until you start getting unending requests for money - with, of course, more promises for worldly happiness and riches. Ah, Satan comes as an angel of light!

What unfolds with these fearful disciples in our text must not become lost on us, my dear friends. Jesus does not enter into the presence of the locked away disciples to begin a therapy session with them. He does not lay out a program for worldly wealth and happiness. They would quickly learn the truth of that! He does not call for innovation that makes the truth of man's sin and need of Savior palatable. The Living Word enters and forgives all sin, just as He forgives ours. And the truth and comfort of that are clearly set before us in Scriptures and the Sacraments.

You see? Nothing changes. ***This is for sinners only!*** This is for us.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott