

SERMON – PASTOR GREG  
23/04/2023

WALK WITH JESUS AS HE WALKS WITH YOU. The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed! Let us pray. Romans 10:9 is one of the key texts in all of my ministry: *If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* We read the same truth in Ephesians 4:4: *There is one Body and one Spirit- just as you were called to one hope when you were called- one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and father of all.* The Lutheran Church has always taught and confessed this reality as well: CA VII: The one holy Christian church is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. Nevertheless, while there is only one holy and Christian church there are many different expressions of that fundamental reality and we call them denominations. And that is because they have their different understandings of God's holy word. Baptism is one area where there are broadly speaking two different views: infant baptism with water and adult baptism with full immersion.

The Baptist tradition highlights our first reading today to support their view: *Peter replied, "Repent and be baptised every one of you for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."* So it seems that Peter is saying that there is a particular method of becoming a Christian. We need to hear the word of God, we need to understand our need for help, we need to ask for forgiveness and we need to be baptised in order to receive the Holy Spirit and to receive salvation. Why then do we baptise infants only a few days old?

The church makes a distinction between PRESCRIPTION and DESCRIPTION. Acts 2 DESCRIBES one account of coming to faith and it was certainly the norm in the early church- men and women heard the Gospel message and responded in faith. But it was not long before their children were also being baptised. There are elements of baptism that are PRESCRIBED: we baptise in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and water must be used and it must be done within a Christian context. But coming to faith in Jesus Christ is more than a simple formula. Infant baptism is based on a variety of biblical texts:

*John 15: I am the Vine; you are the branches...You did not choose me but I chose you.*

*John 3: No one can enter the Kingdom of God unless you are born again of water and Spirit.*

*1 Cor 12: No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit.*

*Eph 2: As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins...Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.*

*Mark 10: Let the little children come to me and do not stop hinder them, because the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.*

So we teach that it is God who offers faith and salvation through His Son, His Spirit and His word- it is God's initiative and when we respond it is only by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. And we are called to respond. The Lutheran Church has always been strong on JUSTIFICATION at the expense of SANCTIFICATION. But the wonderful word from our reading is that after much preaching, warning and pleading about 3000 people became CHRISTIAN!

And it was to people such as these that Peter later wrote two letters. Some of which became foundational to our Confessions: 1:17,18: *For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from your empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers- but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.* Do you remember your Catechism?

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, delivered and freed me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil, not with silver or gold but with his holy and precious blood and with his innocent sufferings and death, in order that I may be his... Saved by the blood of the Lamb.

And our third reading- the Gospel reading gives us the message for today: WALK WITH JESUS AS HE IS WALKING WITH US. It was the three days after the Passover meal, it was two days after his death and burial and two of his disciples were walking back home. All was in vain. They feared for their lives but they were still perplexed because that very morning some of the women had said that they had seen Jesus- alive and resurrected- but how could this be? Impossible. So surely with heavy hearts and heavy shoulders they returned back to where they had come from. But suddenly there is a stranger with them, a stranger who seemed to know nothing, a stranger who asked them: *What are you discussing together as you walk along...What things?* And then he said: *How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.* Jesus had blinded their eyes to see who he was- remember last Sunday when we heard the account of Thomas who refused to believe until he saw Jesus with his own eyes and indeed even put his hand into Jesus' side? Jesus appeared to Thomas but to these two disciples he brought their eyes and hearts and minds to the Word of God- the Holy Scriptures- *the living and enduring word of God that stands forever.*

We too are called to follow Jesus by hearing, reading, praying and living his word revealed in the Holy Scriptures- the Bible.

But there is another wonderful and lovely surprise in our Gospel reading: *(The two disciples) urged him strongly, "Stay with us for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. The guest became the host! Then their eyes were opened and they recognised him.*

My prayer for you today and for the rest of your life on earth that as you read God's word your hearts burn within you and with the hands of faith you may recognise Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and with the eyes of faith you may see Jesus as you continue to follow Him *for surely He is with you always!* Amen.