

Acts 3:12-20

¹² When Peter saw this, he addressed the people: “Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this? Why are you staring at us, as if by our own power or godliness we have made this man walk? ¹³ The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and disowned in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. ¹⁴ You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you. ¹⁵ You killed the Author of Life, whom God raised from the dead. We are witnesses of this. ¹⁶ And on the basis of faith in his name, it is the name of Jesus that has strengthened this man, whom you see and know. This faith that comes through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you. ¹⁷ “Now brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, just like your leaders. ¹⁸ But in this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through the mouth of all the prophets: that his Christ would suffer. ¹⁹ Therefore repent and return to have your sins wiped out, ²⁰ so that refreshing times may come from the presence of the Lord and that he may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you.

Sermon for Easter 2, April 19, 2020 St. Paul’s Green Garden

Text: Acts 3:12-20

Theme: “The Living Jesus Holds a Lasting Victory”

In the name of Jesus, our living Savior, Dear Christian friends,

We can’t wait until it’s over but we don’t know when we will be free from the tyranny of this corona virus. We assume we will score the victory. But that may be assuming too much. And even if doctors, researchers and medical experts along with our “stay at home” measures finally succeed in keeping it at bay, will it last or will it flare up again? Sure, cures and vaccines may help bring back a sense of normalcy. But what happens if we get complacent and the immunity wears off, or a newer virus mutates and threatens world health with a scourge even more vicious? We would like to believe that our country’s and the world’s medical researchers would be able to deal with it on behalf of people in all countries. But the truth is just like military victories scoring a victory over a pandemic like this may not last.

Our personal victories don’t always last either. The A a student get on a test this week can be offset by failing to study and doing poorly on the next one. Last week’s friend might be this week’s enemy. You know how easy it is to experience the thrill of victory one day and the agony of defeat a few days later. But that will never happen when Jesus fights your battles. His last and greatest battle on Good Friday ended in a victory for all of us. It is a victory that we will go on celebrating forever. Peter helps us understand how Jesus brings us onto his winning team. 1. He reaches out to us with the compelling message of sin and grace 2. He graciously invites us to repent 3. He promises to take us home

It is a sad fact that by nature my love of material things, my angry words and my hateful thoughts put me on the losing team. You and I can see that we are on the losing side when we see how illness, injury and sadness come to our lives because of our own sins and the sins of others. After Jesus rose from the dead the Jews could see those consequences of sin. There was a beggar who sat at one of the temple gates everyday and pleaded with people to give him money. Peter and John saw this man one day as they were going to the temple at the hour of prayer. When they saw him Peter looked right at him and said, "I don't have any money to give you but what I do have I WILL give you. In the name of Jesus Christ, stand up and walk." With that Peter helped him up. The man's feet and ankles became strong. He went around the temple walking and jumping and praising God. All the people at the temple recognized this as the crippled beggar. But they were amazed and wondered how he could suddenly be strong enough to walk and jump around. The amazed crowds came to Peter and John wondering what had happened. That is not too unusual. Fans often flock to a winning team. When a sports team is winning it usually has a lot of fans. But what these people mainly saw was the great miracle. As far as Peter was concerned, this miracle was just a starting point.

He really wanted to introduce them to Jesus and his amazing message of sin and grace. Peter spoke out to the crowds, "Why are you so amazed? We didn't do this by our own power." This miracle wasn't for our glory. "**The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus.**" Peter was talking to Jews, people who had eagerly waited for the Savior to come. But what Peter told them was surely a crushing blow. They had not been on the winning side. When they crucified Jesus they had opposed God and put themselves along side Satan and the losing side.

Peter's words convicted them of their sins: "**Jesus, whom you handed over and disowned in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him.** ¹⁴ **You disowned the Holy and Righteous One You killed the Author of Life.**" What had they done? They had rejected and killed God—their own Savior. It must have stunned them when it sank in. They were guilty of murdering God! Can't you imagine their mouths dropping open.

Friends, Peter's accusation puts us on the losing side, too. He puts the responsibility for your sin right on your shoulders. My sins and your sins nailed Jesus to the cross. When you were angry with God this week for letting you or your loved one suffer that is one more way you put Jesus on the cross. When told that dirty joke to your fellow workers that's one more sin of yours that put Jesus on the cross. Yes, we killed the author of life. Each of us has taken our place on the losing side.

Peter made no excuses for the Jews' action of falsely accusing Jesus and demanding his crucifixion. He doesn't excuse our sins that put Jesus on the cross either. But what Peter shows us is that God gave Jesus the victory even though Good Friday looked like

the final defeat. **“God raised Him from the dead.”** As Peter shows the people in Jerusalem, God took an act of defeat, a symbol of death and turned it into a victory. By the Jews’ act of disobedience God had carried out his plan of salvation.

Peter didn’t want them to turn away in unbelief. So he reminded them what the O.T. prophets had written about Jesus. Isaiah predicted the Savior would suffer. He would be **“Stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted?”** Peter wanted them to see how God had turned Christ’s death into a clear victory. He rose from the grave. From that day on he has the victory.

It is true that things are not what they seem. When I look at my life I see my sins. I see how I have turned God’s law on its ear. I can only imagine the Lord breathing out his hot anger at me. But on Good Friday, Jesus scored in every minute of the game and Satan scored zero. So God does not even see your sin. Jesus’ victory means you are on the winning team every day. When Peter showed this wonderful, life-changing truth to his hearers that day near the temple, he wanted them to know that since Jesus paid for our sins and gives us the life-giving message of grace, God invites us to repent.

Peter had showed the Jews their guilt. But God has a solution for the guilt of sinners. Peter urged these Jews to turn to God. **“Therefore repent and return to have your sins wiped out,²⁰ so that refreshing times may come from the presence of the Lord.”** How do you look at repentance? Do you think that you have to repent for God to forgive you? Do you think that God will forgive you if your repentance is “sincere enough”? Think of God’s forgiveness as a cleansing shower. When you turn to God in repentance you step into his cleansing shower. You believe that he really forgives you as he says. Repentance is simply turning toward God to receive his forgiveness by faith. Do you still think you have to do something to clean your record with God? No! Jesus was victorious 2000 years ago and he still is today.

Now you know about your sin. You have repented. Now your Lord wants you to remember that repentance not only means that you turn TO God but that you also TURN AWAY from sin. We all have our sinful weaknesses that our old self likes to indulge in, don’t we? Maybe I like to make cutting remarks against my family members when I feel they have hurt me, or I don’t respect authority and I show it with angry and disrespectful words. Now sinful actions and words may please the sinful nature, but they are an offense to God and hurt our fellow human beings. Remember, the Jesus who won the victory over your sins, is still the winner today. He gives you the strength to say NO to sin. Because when you know the love that he poured out for you to pay for your sins, you will want to turn away from sinful thoughts that lead to sinful actions. **“[The grace of God] teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in the present age.”**

What happens when you trust God to forgive you and give you the strength to resist sin? It means that you share in Jesus' victory everyday. Peter said, "**And on the basis of faith in his name, it is the name of Jesus that has strengthened this man, whom you see and know.**" Jesus' victory doesn't simply mean that he will take away troubles. Sometimes they become more difficult. I am reminded of a fellow Christian in another congregation. He cuts no corners in telling people that he was once addicted to drugs and alcohol. And he also cuts no corners in saying that **God SAVED ME, from the damning force of my sins and he saves me daily from the temptation to fall back into those same sins.** When you repent of your sins, you get ALL the blessings of Christ's victory on the cross.

Everyone of us fights those daily battles with sin. But Jesus is still victorious and he promises that those battles will not last forever. He has already planned a day when he will come to take us home.

I think it is safe to say that we still have a long way to go before we can see the end of this pandemic we have lived with for more than a month. Doctors, nurses, health care workers on the front lines have seen patients, friends and co-workers become ill and a large number of them have died. But those who make it through, both patients and health workers, are eager to get to the point in their health care that they are able to go home to their families. Those health care professionals who have fought faithfully and bravely are themselves eager to go home. How refreshing it will be after weeks of battling the worst that the virus can throw at people, after weeks of being on edge, one day they will finally be able to go home to rest.

Jesus promises that because he defeated Satan in mortal combat he has won victory for us that will last for eternity. His victory over sin and death gives us refreshment from the rigors of the earthly battles we fight each day. Our Jesus will take us to our heavenly home. When he does you will no longer have to fight your sinful desires. You won't have to listen Satan's lies or do battle against the temptations of the world.

One day Jesus will openly show his victory to everyone. He will come personally to take you to the home in heaven that he fought and won for you. Peter told the crowds that Jesus would come to take them home: "**that he may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you.**" We have the same guarantee from the lips of Jesus himself: "**I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.**" This is the place that Jesus says he has prepared for us since the creation of the world.

If you look at the effects of this pandemic on our country and our world, if you see how illness, natural disasters and famines, paralyze people with fear and dread, and you can just imagine how Satan will try to use the economic effects of this pandemic to put a barricade up to block the spread of the gospel, it may seem as if Satan is in the driver's

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seat. Friends, no matter what things look like to our eyes, Jesus is still victorious. Don't give up the battle now. Satan wants you to believe that he still has a chance. He will tempt you to doubt Jesus' power. He will try to make you fear that the worst possible things will happen to you, your loved ones and the world. But dear friends, Jesus has scored the victory and the score is final. No rematch. Satan is down for the count. Now watch and wait for your Savior to come and take you home.

Very few of our earthly victories whether in sports or personal or family victories, will last very long. You got a good grade on a test but there will be another one next week and you might not do as well. You finished a big project at home or your job, but there will be another one in a few months. A team wins a national sports championship but another team may be champion next year. But Jesus won it all for you, forever. His victory means you have not even one single sin hanging over your head. Jesus is the champion. He rose from the dead. Heaven is waiting for you. Amen.