

# *Ascension Lutheran Church*

*Pastor Godkin's Sermon for the week of April 26, 2009*

## The Power of Forgiveness (Luke 24:36-49)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text is from the 24<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke:

“Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

This is the text.

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, spring cleaning; for some it's that time of year again. Out with the old and in with the new. It's a popular time to clean house. Spring is a time of new beginnings. It is a time of new life as we see the flowers begin to blossom and the birds return and life around us seemingly come to life again after the long winter slumber.

Spring can be a time to gain a new perspective as well. As the weather warms perhaps so does our motivation to embark on those summer projects be it painting a chair, assembling a new coffee table, donating clothes to good will, cleaning behind the fridge and so on. The new life of spring helps to spark our ambitions for the coming summer months. We can look at things we would like to work on and improve and change in the near future. Perhaps we also look at things we would like to complete from the year before.

This is the perfect time for the Easter message to take hold. For Easter is the ultimate new beginning. It is also a continuation of sorts of something old. For the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the beginning of a new creation. It is also the fulfillment of God's promise that was given long ago by the prophets in the Old Testament.

Friends, our God is the God of new beginnings. He is the God of life and He is the God who keeps His Word and fulfills what He has promised. We see this in the consistent message of Holy Scripture, from cover to cover, from Genesis to Revelation, from the Old Testament through to the New Testament.

This might seem like a surprising statement. Is the God of the Old Testament the same as the God of the New Testament? Can we rely on the words of the Old Testament as much as the words of the New Testament? Friends, sometimes there is a misunderstanding that the God of the Old Testament is all about wrath and judgement and the God of the New Testament is all about grace and love. But make no mistake, there is one God and the same God shows His grace as well as His holiness as He sees right.

The truth is, the message of the Bible is consistent from beginning to end. It is all about Jesus. Jesus says in our text in Luke's Gospel, "Everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." The Law of Moses is another word for the Pentateuch, or the first five books of the Bible. The Psalms refers to the poetic writings such as the book of Psalms, and the prophets means all the major and minor prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and so on. And so when Jesus refers here to the Law, the Prophets and Psalms He is speaking about the entire Old Testament.

In the Old Testament we find essentially the same message as the New Testament; in both testaments we find the call to repentance and forgiveness through the Messiah. The Old Testament looks forward to the Christ and the New Testament reveals Him. In fact, in the Old Testament we find some of the sweetest Good News in the entire Bible.

In Psalm 16, for example, it gives hope through the Messiah. It says that God would not abandon the Messiah to the grave but that He would raise Him. And the Psalmist rejoices as we also may rejoice in Him. It reads, "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore".

This path of life, this fullness of joy, these everlasting pleasures come in Jesus come through His death for our sins and His resurrection to life. In Him there is life, there is hope, and there is escape from the doldrums of this perishing world.

All the laws of the Old Testament, all the animal sacrifices, and all the promises given to Adam and Eve, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David and so on find their yes in Jesus Christ. He is the focal point of human history. For Jesus is the one man, the God-man who saves humanity, all who believe. "All who call on His Name will be saved" and "There is no other name under heaven by which men must be saved."

Friends, our Lord uses the word repentance in the Gospels over and over again. This is a word that can make us shake in our boots. It tends to bring about thoughts of judgement.

And yet Jesus says that the repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed to all nations. Repentance means to be changed; it involves being turned. There is a call for us all to be turned from our sins and find forgiveness through the Name of Jesus Christ. This is the heart and centre of God's message: Repent and receive the forgiveness sins in Jesus Christ.

Repentance and forgiveness is how we receive Jesus. These two go together. They come as a package. If we say we are forgiven but have no contrition for our sins or desire to change then it is a delusion. Repentance and forgiveness gives the power of eternal life and it is how we receive purpose and meaning to our life right now. When we are brought low and humbly confess our sins with a desire to change, the Lord lifts us up; He gives the heights of heaven through Jesus.

There is tremendous power in this. Normally when we think of things that have power we think of things like rockets or trains or planes or hot rod cars might come to mind. But the greatest power in the world is the power of forgiveness. Through repentance and forgiveness the Lord rescues us from an eternity of hopelessness and misery in the depths of hell to an eternity of joy and peace and love in His presence in His Heavenly glory. And the power of His forgiveness gives a resurrection on the Last Day.

Note that in our text Jesus' resurrection body is physical. He eats the piece of broiled fish to show this. This means that through Him, through being turned to Him we too will receive a new physical body on the Last Day. But unlike our bodies right now, our bodies on the Last Day will last forever. There will never be another cold or ache or pain or sore joint.

This is the power of forgiveness. It transforms us into a new creation because through it we receive Jesus into our hearts and He begins to live through us. This is why it is most important to hold to His Word and meditate on it and seek to apply it to life's situations each day. As it says in James 4, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you."

The power of forgiveness raises the dead. It lifts the burden of guilt and it frees us from the heavy load of a grudge we may be nursing. It restores relationships with our neighbours and most of all it restores our relationship with God.

Friends, none of us is without fault. We all err in various ways. But the power that separates the elect people of God is forgiveness. There is forgiveness in Jesus and we are called to have this forgiveness, this love and grace spill over into our relationships with each other.

And so our Lord Jesus gave the great commission to His disciples and to His church of every generation, "that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His Name to all nations beginning at Jerusalem." Friends, the Lord "wants all to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. 2). He wants to bring the new resurrection life to every person in creation. Like a spring cleaning, out with the old and in with the new, He wants to bring this new resurrected life to everyone we see.

Indeed, this is His message to all creation. And so as we focus on our spring cleaning projects this year may we most importantly be focused on the ultimate spring cleaning, the new birth, the new life, the resurrection to come through Christ. May our minds be set on the ultimate project, the mission from God to proclaim this Good News to all creation. His grace be with you. Amen. The peace of God that surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.