

Cut to the Heart!

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

So grace, mercy and peace are yours from God our Father through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

You guys want a glimpse into the world of preacher humor? I know – that might be a little scary to think about. But do you want to know what kind of YouTube videos we send to each other? Of course you start with things like “Lutheran Satire” – those are always good for a laugh. I mean the tagline is “Teaching theology by making fun of stuff.” How can that not be funny? But recently, I was sent one called “Honest Preacher.” It’s the scene of a Sunday sermon. It starts with the organ music finishing up the Hymn of the Day and the preacher walking up to the pulpit. He says his silent prayer, the greeting, and then asks if he can digress.

That’s when it gets kind of funny as he starts whining, ‘Guys, sometimes you’re bad. You’re supposed to be good. You come into my office and you’re like “Whoops.” Stop it! You’re making me look bad in front of God.’ Then he turns on Dan and announces that Dan is the worst. “What’s your deal Dan?” he asks.

Now, I can’t do it justice, you’ll have to google it later, but just seeing him banging his head on the pulpit and then picking up his Bible and saying, “Oh look, it’s Jesus. He said – ‘Stop it’ – the word of the Lord.” And then he walks off.

I laugh, but then I realize that sometimes, that’s the job of the preacher, maybe not quite in that way with the whining and name calling, but calling out sin...certainly. And so you wonder, why do people come back? Why do you come back? Today, I think our readings show the answer to that. In fact, in our readings this Third Sunday of Easter, we see how important a clear preaching of God’s condemning law is. We need it to **Cut to the Heart.**

That’s what we hear Peter’s sermon on Pentecost did to those Jews in Jerusalem who came out to find out what was going on and saw the working of the Holy Spirit. Scan through that reading from Acts there. Our text starts with Peter declaring the power and glory of God when it came to the person of our risen Savior Jesus Christ. Peter tells them, “We’ve all seen him. Christ is risen!” He is risen indeed! And then in verse 33, Peter describes Jesus’ ascension and exaltation – at the place of power and authority, sending out the Holy Spirit like all of them that day heard and saw in those Pentecost miracles: the sound of the wind and the flames of fire on their heads and the speaking in all those different languages.

In verses 34-35, Peter quotes the Old Testament to make the point that we should have been expecting all this because it is just what God had said would happen. And then, in verse 36, he gets to his stirring conclusion. Let me read that for you: ³⁶ **“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”** The Greek word order actually says it like this: **“Therefore let the whole house of Israel know that God made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus, whom you crucified,”** saving that zinger for the very last thing he says. You know this Messiah you’ve been waiting for and God promised, this one that is so awesome. He is the Lord! That one? Yeah, you killed him.

Ouch! Right? Why would Peter do that? Because it was the truth. And they needed to hear the truth. They needed to realize that they weren’t OK just because they were Jews; they weren’t OK just because they were somehow better than other nations. They weren’t OK just because they brought their offerings for Pentecost

and made their way to the temple. They had just killed the one God sent to them. They were BAD and they needed to realize it.

And look at their reaction. ³⁷ **When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”** What shall we do? This is a problem. How do we fix it? They realized that Peter was right. God had promised the Messiah and Jesus did everything the Messiah was supposed to – and God proved it again and again. This was the one. In hindsight, it all lined up and made them killers of God’s Son.

So of course, they wanted to know how to fix it. *“What can we do?”* Have you ever been there with them, **cut to the heart**, realizing what you have done? Think about it. We know the truths, too, when we are reminded of them. God *has* given us everything. Of course. Even the ability to be alive and breathing today is a gift of God. He loved us so much he planned our salvation before we were even born and he sent his Son to sacrifice for our sins. And Jesus finished that work and proved it by rising from the dead. These are the things we know and have been reviewing and celebrating. Now comes the zinger – so why do we keep on killing him? Why do we keep driving him away?

That’s what our every sin does – every thought, word or deed that doesn’t put him first – every anger or lust, every word that is either proud or deceptive, every action that does not help others but only has our interests in mind – every sin makes it impossible to be with God.

Does that cut to the heart? Are you asking with those people of Jerusalem, “What shall we do?” Or are you so much of a Jesus-murderer that you don’t think you need much help? “Aw, Pastor’s just being dramatic.” Are you willing to throw all God’s divine effort and pain and sacrifice out the window and say, “I’m pretty good on my own.”? “After all, no one can be perfect and I do a pretty good job of being a good person.”

Who needs what Jesus did then?!

Last week, all the readings showed us the proof that Jesus was risen – as he physically appeared to them that Easter Sunday night and then came again the next week and had Thomas touch his nail holes, feel his wounds. That was the proof. Today, our readings show us how a proper preaching of God’s law and gospel does that, too. It shows the proof by what it does to our hearts.

Think about it. What proved Jesus’ resurrection to the two on the road to Emmaus? It wasn’t seeing him, was it? They didn’t recognize him. It was how their hearts burned when he opened up the Scriptures to them. And how did he do that? He started by calling them **“Foolish”** and **“Slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.”** That’s pretty condemning. But then he explained it all through the power of the Word – working on their hearts. And then when he broke bread, it clicked. They realized how he had forgiven and fixed their foolishness.

In this Acts lesson, Peter does the same thing. He calls his hearers murderers – but then he answers the questions their hearts can’t help but ask “What can we do?” And his answer isn’t something to do but what is done for them, to them. **“Repent!”** He says. “Change your heart.”

Isn’t that what God just did with the power of His word, changing them from those who thought they had it all going on to those begging for God’s answer? And then Peter says, **“Be baptized”** – again something that only has power because of what God has put into it. Look at how he describes what happens:

“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. That’s not something their work could get. That’s only a gift from the one who died to pay for that forgiveness and prayed that they might receive it. Did you ever think about that? Your baptism is God answering Jesus’ prayer from the cross – “Father, forgive them.” And Peter goes on:

And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. You receive the *gift* of faith – something that only comes through the Holy Spirit. So when they asked what they had to do – Peter just shows them what has been done. In fact, he calls it a promise. Look at verse 39: **The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”**

As much as only God's law can cut to our hearts through all of our defenses and excuses, notice how Peter makes clear that only the gospel, the good news of Jesus' sacrificial death and resurrection can cut to the heart and heal.

Just like in a surgery, the surgeon has to cut in order to fix what is wrong, removing what is blocking or broken before they can replace what is needed. Praise God that he has given his Word and has given us the opportunity to hear his Word and take it to heart, that it might cut out all of our foolishness and then replace what has been cut out with the power and love of God, the forgiveness he won and paid for fully and freely, the position as his child he earned and gave to you in your baptism, the sweet, sweet healing balm of the gospel. Like the hymnwriter put it:

There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole;
There is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul.

May God's law always cut to the heart, so that we may always cherish the healing gospel truth that Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Alleluia. Amen.