

Sunday, April 18, 2021
The Third Sunday after Easter

He Learned Well

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen.

I came upon a very sad, a tragic story this past week. It wasn't in the news. I was told about it by an individual involved; a grandmother who took her grandson to Costco. Coming out of Costco and going to her car, they unloaded their cart. As the grandson was pushing the cart back to the receiving area for the carts he stopped, and he looked in the car that was right next to him. He stopped, and he looked; and he looked at his grandmother and said 'Grandma, I think something's wrong.' She said what do you mean? Grandma come look, there is a man here bleeding from his nose. When she went over and looked in the car, she realized the man had been bleeding from his nose, but it wasn't bleeding anymore. He had put a gun underneath his chin and committed suicide.

How do you take that image out of your mind? What do you do in a situation like that? And as I talked with this grandmother about this experience, she went through a whole different series of emotions. Feelings that she had experienced and it kind of ended with, "why?" Why would this person do it? What would this do to this individual's family? Whether it was his mom and dad, or a wife and children? What would this do to her grandson? What would this do to everyone involved? The police who come, the firefighters who came, the ambulance crew, the coroner who came, all people of Costco were witnessing this.

Why? I don't know this man. I don't know his thoughts, but I do know that suicides in America, especially among younger people in the last 13 months is up over 800%. And there's a pretty common theme among those who have committed suicide and left things in writing, or left things on YouTube, or on their own phones. They felt helpless. They felt that there was no purpose in life. The pandemic and being alone was driving them crazy. And as a result, there is no hope. And of course, as I talk with this person, and there are some other people around too, one

of the immediate responses to these things is; 'we need more mental care for these people. We need to spend more money so that they can get counseling and not do this.'" Do you know I had to be honest and say we have about three times more people in the counseling world today than we did just ten years ago, and look at what it's doing. The answer is not found in throwing more money at the problem. It's not in training more people in the secular world of counseling today, which tells people that they are a product of a Big Bang and the purpose in life is to please yourself.

The answer is found in Easter and what we read this morning in the gospel. We referred to it last week. Jesus met with His disciples the evening of Easter and He opened their minds to understand the scriptures. What was it, in particular, they were to understand? Well as we saw last week; number one that the Christ should suffer and die, should rise on the third day, that repentance and forgiveness should be preached in His name to all nations. But it ended with- you are witnesses of these things. So, hope and forgiveness comes through Christ. It's hope in Him, it's hope through Him, and it's that hope and that faith that gives us purpose. Again, hope in the Greek is an assured expectation; it's a promise that's made by God, a divine promise. It is the exact opposite of woe, which is divine judgment guaranteed. But we have hope, this promise from God of forgiveness. We have this promise from God of Salvation. We have this promise of God that through Christ, we are the children of God, sons and daughters of God, just as Jesus is the Son of God. We are made coheirs of the Kingdom of heaven and we have been given purpose. Preach and teach these things.

Well as we now continue through the Easter season, we're going to answer the question; Did what Christ said to them, when He opened the scriptures up to them and breathed on them and said receive the Holy Spirit; did that impact the disciples who were scared and hiding? Did it impact their faith? Did it impact their life? Did it impact their very actions? Because you see faith, as Jesus pointed out here, requires us and challenges us to step up and live our faith. The disciples remained faithful. As we see in our gospel this morning they went to the temple. They went to the temple about the 9th hour which was the time of evening prayer and they entered through the gate that is called beautiful.

This was the primary entrance to the temple. It was the gate that was between the court of Gentiles and the court of women. So, it's where all Jewish people would enter. There were 12 steps up to it. It is the only gate of the temple, and there are nine of them; it's the only one that was made out of Corinthian bronze. It was 75 feet tall, double doors that required 20 men to open each door. Since it was the primary entrance, this was a perfect place for a person who was born crippled to be placed and ask for alms. And he was being carried there by friends, family to do this. And again, in the minds of the people giving this man alms, was a way of showing mercy and grace to him because they were taught at that time inappropriately, I might add; that if a child was born with a disability as this, it was because the child was born with some inbred sin or because of the sins of the parents or the sins of the family. It was punishment. When this man was there, he would just have his head down, lest he dare look up at any of the people, because he was such a profound sinner. And it was only out of mercy and grace, undeserved love that he might get a penny or two. He probably got more terrible looks, or probably got more comments about his pathetic, sinful, life and being.

So as these men are bringing him, and he's being carried past Peter and John, getting ready to be laid down, he speaks and he asks for alms. But his head is down. What's the first thing that Peter says? "Look at us." Immediately with these very first words, he validates the man's existence and brings that man up to his level. It's OK to look me in the eye. Both Peter and John fixed their gaze on him and he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something. Then his heart probably dropped with the first words from Peter, 'I have no silver and gold, but (giant eraser) what I have, I give you. Can you imagine how fast this must have been going through this man's mind? He has no money, he's going to give me something that he has; "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk," and he reached down took the man by his right hand and lifted him up off of that bed and the man's legs were immediately strengthened. I want you to think of what Peter had just done there, and I want you to think of Jesus looking down from heaven. Jesus, his teacher. What have we seen so many times in the miracles? It's been pointed out in countless sermons. Jesus employed touch, personal touch. Something we've been missing for the last 13 months. But personal touch, which again at that time, was considered to

be something that made you unclean if you touched one of these sinners. But Peter had learned well, he reached out, he touched this man took him by his right hand. It is so antithetical to what is going on today, and it was against society at that time because he was touching a sinner. But most of all, this took a phenomenal step of faith.

We talk about what did Jesus do? A couple of weeks ago, we talked about what would Jesus do? And what should we do? A touch. So would Jesus now fulfill what He had said to his disciples? But we're seeing the strength of the Holy Spirit. Would He be like when that one leper said to him, 'if you will, you can heal me' and Jesus simply said, "I will." It took a lot of faith for Peter to take that man's hand and say, "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk," and to begin pulling him. You know, I've thought of that many times when I've been at the hospital; so I just reach out grab this person's hand and say "in the name of Jesus Christ get up get out of this bed, and go home." I am almost ashamed to say, yeah but only when the person was comatose and no one else was in the room. Peter's doing it in front of a gigantic crowd. He's doing in the middle of the temple, and Jesus said, "I will." And leaping up, the man stood, began to walk into the temple with them walking and leaping and praising God and everyone was amazed at what had happened.

You see Peter remembered. He remembered that Jesus had promised the Holy Spirit and that Holy Spirit would come with power. And so, he did it and then when everybody stood there with their mouths agape., he addressed the situation, he took the situation by the hand, and he said; "Men of Israel, why do you wonder and stare at us? Why would you expect anything less than this, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? That is such a powerful verse because he's making the point; it's not my power. If you think it was me who did this, it's misplaced. No Prophet had power. The Holy Spirit has power to work through an individual. And piety, here this is directly aimed at the religious leaders who were teaching that you were saved by your good works. And they made such a big deal of how pious they were and what a show it was. And it wasn't that they were real pious people here either. So it's not our power and it's not that we're pious, and he clearly identifies the God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac, Jacob.

Our forefathers glorified His servant, Jesus who... and here is where this gets really powerful; whom you delivered, you denied in the presence of Pilate when he, (Pilate) had decided to release Him. And he continues, as if delivering Jesus over and denying him was not enough. You killed the author of life. Which takes us back to John 1, "that through Christ all things were made." But this Jesus, this author of life, that you killed, God raised from the dead and to this we are witnesses. Remember last week? They were witnesses. They were to give a testimony. Here's Peter, he is giving it. And by His name, by faith in His name, this man has been made strong. And that faith, through Jesus, has given this man perfect health in the presence of you all. Perfect health? Good physical health, and good spiritual health. His sins are forgiven, he is a child of God. But it is faith, faith in Jesus, faith through the Holy Spirit that they were seeing this in their presence.

Which now makes them witnesses. And now they have the testimony. That ending, you are now witnesses is profound. It's like someone who has seen a major crime occur and a police officer says to them, you saw it, you're a witness. You need to tell the story, so this doesn't happen again. In this case, it's your witnesses. You saw it, you need to tell others because this is going to happen again, and people need to understand that. You know that sermon is very powerful, very condemning. I think we can learn a lot from it though, notice how Peter lead with the law that which would convict them. And he must have seen heads dropping, yeah, we did. We delivered Him. We denied Him. We killed Him. We were wrong. Peter then goes right into the gospel, "Brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance." It is like, 'it's OK, don't worry.' And of course, Peter could say this because he himself had denied Jesus three times. "Repent therefore and turn again." In other words, "you were right with God before, you believed Him, but now turn back to Him." Here's the good news, you turn back to Him now that your sins might be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord. And think of what that is saying. It's what we focused on back at Easter. Christ is with us right now and this is what Peter was saying. And that He may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus. He's going to return.

When we look at this account, Peter learned well from what Jesus had revealed to them. He touched, he did what Jesus did. He remembered the scriptures; 'by the power of the Holy Spirit,' just as Jesus said. He offered grace where it wasn't deserved. He testified just as Jesus had said. And then he took that testimony, and he took all those people and he pulled them into it and said and now you're witnesses too and you have a purpose in life.

Which takes me back to that sad event in the Costco parking lot. That's what happens when we have no purpose, when we don't know Jesus, we have no hope. I don't know if this is true or not, I have a feeling it is. I was told this last week that within our colleges of higher education, extremely liberal professors outnumber conservative ones 33 to 1. What are they teaching? Exactly what we're seeing in our country and people are flocking to it; that we need the government to take care of everything. Which is so profoundly biblical and apocalyptic in nature that it kind of scares me. I believe it's a call to us, to you and me to be the Peter and John, to realize Jesus himself is with us the Holy Spirit is in our heart when we see an opportunity start witnessing, take the hand, seize the moment, to learn well and then put that learning into living for Him. In our Savior's Name, Amen