

April 15, 2018

What is the Next Step?

PRAYER

May the words of my mouth be meditations of our hearts and be always acceptable unto Thee. O Lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

SERMON

The first few Sundays of Easter are filled with stories from the gospel about the resurrection appearances. It's a very important part of understanding who we are. Who Jesus was and is, and what it means to be Jesus' disciples. Last week you might remember that Jesus, according to the gospel according to John, that first Sunday evening comes to the disciples behind locked doors. He presents himself, "Peace be with you." He shows them his hands and his side in order to help them to understand who this is. Who is there standing in front of them. He breathes on them and the spirit of God comes upon them and he says, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

It was the first step in the disciples understanding what it was they had been prepared for. Because they were questioning still where they were to go and what they were to do. This story this morning from the gospel according to Luke, the disciples are together. There's been a resurrection appearance to some of the disciples and yet they're still unsure, still unclear about what they are to do now. What is the next step?

And when Jesus appears to them this time. There's still some fear, still unsure. And yet he begins to share with them. He wants them to realize first and foremost that it's truly me, the one that walked with you those three years. This is not a ghost. He does that by asking for something to

eat. Ghosts doesn't do that. He's trying to reassure them that he is truly the one who had walked with them, had talked with them, had performed the miracles. Had fed the multitudes that this was indeed Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.

And now he has to again make it clear to them what their next step is. What are you called to do? You disciples, you are the witnesses. What are you called to do? Now if I had been a disciple and Jesus appeared again after being crucified, after being in the tomb for three days, and now he was standing among us again. My first thought, and I would have probably would have suggested it to him, because that's what I do, (Laughter) say great now you're going to lead us again. What a statement that would be?

Risen Lord has the marks of the nails in his hands. Has where the spear went in his side. Has the marks of the nails in his feet. Now he gets out there, we'll back you up. You can share with the world your message again and maybe this time they'll actually listen to you. Everybody would listen to you. After all, this is great you came back from the dead. Not God's plan. Which is why God is God and I am not, and neither are you.

What does he say to the disciples? He reminds them what's been going on. He reminds them that this is all part of the plan. It's been laid out in the scriptures. You can see it in the books of Moses. You can see it in the prophets, you can see it in the Psalms. This is the fulfillment of those things. This is not something radically new and different from the story that has been taken place. You should have gotten that when I was with you for those three years but here it is again.

And he opens their minds to the scriptures about the Messiah, so that they can maybe understand this time. And again, just like in the

appearance in the gospel according to John, he gives them their next actions. You are to go and proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins.

Now that's not radically new either. After all, what did John the Baptizer come on the scene saying, "Repent, turn back, come and be baptized. Come and wash the guilt of sin away. As you turn around allow God to take that away so that you are prepared to hear what God is now doing." Repent, forgiveness. Jesus comes to be baptized. He comes back after the 40 days in the wilderness and how does he start his teaching.

Repent, acknowledge your sinfulness. Acknowledge where you have turned away from God. Repent, return, turn back to God and God will forgive you. And now you are prepared to hear where God will lead you. Where the Son of God will lead you because the next thing he begins to teach. Repent, forgiveness, kingdom of God. You are no longer repenting and being forgiven just to return to the life you were living before.

Now you repent, turn away, you are forgiven, and you are becoming a citizen of God's kingdom. Where no longer is it the external law that you are trying to abide by. And living according to that law and failing. But now God's law will be written on your heart. Now you will be a part of God's kingdom in a way that you never were before. And so now, that this promise has been made repent, forgiveness, kingdom of God, eternal life, fullness of God's kingdom is manifest in the life, death, resurrection of Jesus.

That's the next step. And who is to proclaim that. The witnesses, the ones who have seen, the ones who have now had their minds open to the scripture to understand fully what it was that Moses, the prophets, the Psalms were saying. So, they could understand the events that they themselves have taken part in. Now as witnesses you are called to go

and proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins. But not in that partial, sacrificial we have to do this over and over again. But the forgiveness of sins is an entrance into God's kingdom. Your lives are changed. The Spirit of God will go with you and your life is changed not from the outside but from the inside.

Now as God becomes a part of who you are, as God fulfills the promise that God made through Jesus Christ. Now you are God's children. Now you walk in relationship with God. God with you. And you recognize around you sons and daughters of God. The children of God, your brothers and your sisters. Go and proclaim repentance and forgiveness. That ultimate forgiveness of sins, the sins of the world. Because Jesus took them to the cross, buried them in the tomb. Rose to a new life without that sinfulness nor the need for punishment for those sins.

That's what they are witnesses to. That's what they are called to go and proclaim. Go, as my father has sent me, now I'm sending you the next step. Go and proclaim repentance and forgiveness to that ultimate place of God's kingdom of being his sons and daughters. His children in the world with the expectation and promise of eternal life.

That's our gift. That's what is given. But the message has to be proclaimed. Sometimes we get this idea that we accept the gift and our job is done. No doubt that the disciples would have liked to have thought great we have eternal life. The rest of the world can fend for themselves. (Laughter)

Not so, now you have to go out and proclaim what you know. What you have seen that you are a witness to. And so, it is with us. We are called to proclaim repentance and forgiveness, but proclamation is not enough. It can only be proclaimed by the practicing of repentance and forgiveness. We are called to live that out and not just repent to God. God I'm so sorry, I know I'm not living up to your standards and I know

that you forgive me. And I know that Jesus died on the cross for my sins and they are forgiven, and I am a part of the kingdom of God. I'm not real sure about these other people.

It's not enough. We live it out. Our repentance and forgiveness is not just towards God and from God. It's for each other. And isn't that the hard part. We are called to practice what we proclaim. To forgive, to repent. Because it's still part of our lives to hurt one another. Even though we are God's children, even though we are citizens of God's kingdom. We still hurt one another.

Sometimes we know about it, sometimes we don't. Sometimes it's intentional, sometimes it's not. But it's a part of every life. And as God's children, we are called to recognize, to look. To recognize that we hurt others and repent. To turn away from that. And part of that repentance is to ask forgiveness.

To acknowledge what we have done wrong when we are aware. Acknowledge whether it was intentional or unintentional. To ask forgiveness because I need it from you when I hurt you. And sometimes the more difficult part is not to go to the other and ask for forgiveness. But is to recognize that when we are hurt others whether they know it or don't know it. Whether it's intentional or unintentional. Whether actions hurt us, believe it or not God expects us to forgive them. Whether or not they ask our forgiveness. There is nothing that we are called to do as Christians I believe is more difficult than that.

To recognize that we have the power to forgive the other. Even if they don't recognize the hurt they've caused. To be able to offer that is a gift for them. To proclaim that is the kingdom of God where we are called to be brothers and sisters. We are called to be in relationship with one another. And being in relationship with somebody else almost always causes us to stumble, to fall, to hurt the other, or to be hurt by the

other. And yet, the proclamation is the same. Repent, I'm sorry. I'm not going to do that again, if I can help it. I'm going to try and do better. To ask for forgiveness but even more importantly to offer forgiveness. Because that is who God is. God loved the world so much that God wouldn't allow our sinfulness to be the last word, the last action.

God loves us so much that forgiveness, adoption as children, that is God's action. And he asks us, maybe more, he begs us to find it in our hearts to forgive others, so that there can be peace. So that there can be hope in the world, so that we can truly begin to reflect the kingdom of God here and now. So that we might find the peace that passes understanding. We are the disciples, we are the witnesses. As we have been forgiven so we are called to forgive. May that be our proclamation to the world. That your sins are forgiven, that relationship is possible. That's God's love overcomes hate and we can live together as brothers and sisters.

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