

Third Sunday of Easter – 8AM

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Alright friends. Today I'm not preaching on the Gospel, and this is not just because I LOVE this particular reading from Acts, but I want to note for the record, that I kinda think the Acts of the Apostles are just as important as the four Gospels. I really didn't appreciate until I got to divinity school that the book of Acts is so important because it is basically the Gospel according to Luke part 2, as Luke wrote it in tandem with his Gospel.

But I digress.

Last week we heard from Jesus who says to his disciples that if any sins are forgiven, they are forgiven and if they are retained, they are retained. And at least the way we talked about it last week, we leaned into our ability to both forgive and be forgiven as well as the fact that we may need to retain the sins and hurts done to us because we may not be in a place to forgive. And the fact that that's ok.

Today feels a little bit like a continuation to me, because Peter confronts the crowds who condemned and killed Jesus... and confronts us... and says its ok. That God's grace is always here for us.

Even though you may be like me and feel tempted to read this as a pretty intense passage, especially when Peter ends by saying, "Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out."

And in the back of my mind I've got the sort of history of the church like the inquisition or the crusades.

This sort of repent or else mentality exists today too and a governmental official whom I shall not name posted on social media, "God is sending America strong signs to tell us to repent. Earthquakes and eclipses and many more things to come."

John Stewart from the daily show played this particular bit up and its ridiculousness trying to show off how God would be thinking about this, "Ah yes, I will let humanity know I am wroth by dimming the lights and lightly shaking New Jersey, that will show them!"

But the power of repentance isn't the escape from some judgment. The power of repentance is the fact that no sin is so great that we cannot know love. We are always capable of loving and being loved. That said, FEELING loved... KNOWING emotionally, not just intellectually, that we are loved is not always simple.

But Peter knows, at the core of his being, that he is loved. Perhaps better than just about any other person alive at this time. Because Peter failed as much as any person has ever, and yet he is the rock upon which the church is built.

Peter calls for repentance from the depths of his insufficiency and God's love in spite of it. That Peter denied Jesus on the day that Jesus died. That Peter confessed not knowing Jesus and yet Jesus returned from the dead and never stopped loving Peter.

When Peter says, "Friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out." He knows because he too acted out of human frailty. And calls the people not to repent for fear of the wrath to come but rather because Peter knows what it is to be haunted by a mistake so grave you think its beyond forgiveness.

But Peter bears witness to how he is forgiven. And calls the people before him to cast off their sins and know that love is always there. That it's a better path to walk than really anything else, especially a path of self-hatred and guilt.

I wonder if you have made a mistake you thought was so big it couldn't be forgiven. I wonder if you have made a mistake that at some level you know as small but which weighs on you like a yoke.

I wonder if you've been on the other side of that equation too. If you have ever received grace from another person or extended it. Do you remember what that feeling was like? To receive kindness in the midst of shame or guilt or to offer it to someone struggling?

Peter reminds us that there's always a path forward from the bondage of sin and guilt, that we don't need to just be stuck as we are. Seek love because it will be found, it's there for everyone, none of us are doomed to sit damned to sin, and sadness. And what does that practically look like? What does it look like to change?

Find the story you need to tell and tell it. To the person who wronged you or you have wronged. Tell it to someone here in the church you care about or to a friend. If you are told such a story by someone who is angry or hurt, listen with love, don't react, simply hold and wonder at the person before you.

The words of scripture are not meant simply for some impractical ideal. They are a reminder of our power and agency. What each of us can do. Y'all do it all the time, you guys make real Christ's love everyday. Don't forget what you can do and how you can love, especially when it's hardest. Amen.