

Sharing God's Love

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Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church

Pastor Dr. Eric Peterson

Jesus Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed! This morning we stand together on this basic truth: Jesus Christ is Lord, and He is our God. What a difference knowing Jesus Christ makes in our lives. We can look death straight in the face and not be afraid. We can be assured that whatever our circumstances and challenges, our God is greater. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ does not promise to make our lives easier but to make us stronger. Jesus Christ has won the victory for us over sin, death, and the judgment of God. Therefore, nothing can ever separate us from the love of God.

The Apostle John wrote, ***“Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”*** What stands out in his statement is the abundance of evidence that assured the disciples Jesus is the Son of God. There were so many things Jesus did, it would have been impossible to share them all. Imagine for a moment

that you wanted to share your faith with a friend. You wouldn't tell them everything you know about God or the Bible. You would share how Jesus influenced your faith and life. In a similar way, John helps us understand what transformed his life and what caused him to believe in Jesus Christ.

On the top of John's list of stories is the resurrection. John tells us that he was with Peter on that first Easter morning in Jerusalem when Mary Madeline came rushing into their presence all excited and upset. ***"The stone is rolled away. His body is gone. What are we going to do?"*** In a flash, they ran together to Jesus' tomb. And sure enough, the stone was rolled away from the front of the tomb. John was younger and faster, so he arrived at the tomb first and he looked in. Peter was slower but bolder. When he arrived, he immediately went into the tomb and found it empty. John tells us that what struck his eye, were the linens used to wrap Jesus' body for burial. He was amazed that they were still there. They were lying as if Jesus' body had just passed through them. They were perfectly laid out and undisturbed. If someone had stolen Jesus' body, why were the linens still there? It was at that moment he came to believe Jesus had risen from the dead. He also tells us that he experienced

Jesus' resurrection before he understood what Jesus' had told the disciples about rising again and before he understood the scriptures. The resurrection of Jesus opened up John's heart and mind to see Jesus in a new perspective. He described it as a light shining in the darkness, which helped him to see what he couldn't see before...Jesus is God.

Another transformative moment was Jesus' appearance to the disciples in the upper room. John tells us they had locked the doors. They gathered that night in fear that the Jewish leaders would arrest them for being Jesus' disciples. But as the disciples met that night and talked about the possibility that Jesus was alive, another fear, perhaps even greater, entered their minds. What will Jesus do when He finds them? They had all abandoned Him. This morning we celebrate Jesus' resurrection. But how would you feel if Jesus suddenly appeared in this service? Would you be ashamed? Would you be fearful because He knows all of your sins? The disciples were. I would be too. This is why it was so amazing that when Jesus appeared to the disciples He said, ***"Peace be with you."*** He calmed all their fears. Whatever fears you have in your heart this morning...listen to what

Jesus is saying to you, ***“Look at my hands, touch my side and believe. I did this for you. This is how much I love you. Don’t be afraid. I am not here to judge you but to forgive you. And don’t be afraid of what is outside that door or any of the things that trouble you. I am with you.”*** John said, ***“It was amazing.”*** His fear turned into joy. But he also said that a week later, when Jesus appeared to them again, they still locked the doors. They still were afraid.

When you plant a seed in the ground, the whole plant does not suddenly appear. It takes time for the plant to grow. The disciples’ faith did not suddenly happen all at once. Jesus kept coming back to them time and time again until all their uncertainties faded away. Thomas didn’t get to see Jesus the first night and he said he wouldn’t believe it. Maybe this is where you are this morning. Maybe you are struggling to believe or struggling to let go of your anxieties and fears. The good news is Jesus kept coming back to the disciples again and again assuring them He was alive. Faith is a gift of God. This morning, if you are struggling like Thomas, it is okay. Just ask Jesus to help your faith, and invite Him to come into your life, so you can experience the reality of His love for you. He will come.

A third thing that strengthens the disciples' faith was the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, ***"Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."*** And with that, He breathed on them and said, ***"Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."*** ***"Peace be with you"*** means far more than may you be saved from trouble.

Peace means: ***"Wholeness of life when everything in life comes together for our good and to glorify God."*** When Jesus breathed on them it was an act of recreation. In the story of creation, God took dirt and breathed on it and man became a living being. When Jesus breathed on the disciples, He was giving them a new life. He was recreating them to be the people God meant them to be. This is my prayer for each of you this morning, that Jesus would breathe on you and give you new life. Would you pray with me? ***"Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of all those who are hearing this message with the fire of God's love. Help us in our brokenness to be assured of your presence in our lives. Just like You renew the face of the earth every day, renew our hearts and minds that we might know Your love and have hearts to share Your love with those around us. Amen."***

In the First Letter of John, John wrote: ***“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched...this we proclaim concerning the Word of life...We write this to make our joy complete”*** (I John 1:1,4). John ultimately wanted us to share in the joy and fellowship that comes from knowing Christ. Our joy is not complete until we can know God’s love in our own hearts and share God’s love with someone else.

Let me tell you a story. As you know this is a very difficult time in my life and a difficult time for my family. I was recently diagnosed with two new kinds of cancer. Two weeks ago I had to have a needle biopsy on my lung. That morning I asked God to help me, and I was led to read Psalm 42:5, ***“Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why are you disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.”*** It described where I was completely. I was really anxious. So I prayed, Lord, help me to trust in You, and help me to be a support to those who care for me this morning. That morning I had a delightful nurse named Miriam. I said to her, ***“You have a beautiful name. Your parents must have wanted***

*you to be very spiritual because Miriam was a prophetess.” And she said, “I am not very spiritual, but this has been a really difficult time and so recently I started reading the Psalms hoping to find encouragement.” And I said, “Really, I was looking for encouragement myself this morning, and I came across Psalm 42:5. You ought to check it out.” And she did. She grabbed her cell phone and read the verse to me in Hebrew. **“Put your hope in God, I will yet praise him who is my Savior and my God.”** “This is great,” she said. And she burst into a smile and thanked me. Then I started to smile too, and my anxiety was gone. I can’t explain it. When you yield your life in obedience to God, you open your life to be a vessel of His love. The fruit of the Spirit is joy. Jesus found joy even while carrying His cross. In the most difficult moment you and I could ever imagine, God blessed Jesus with a sense of wellbeing. If you want to experience crazy joy...you need to give your life away in reckless abandonment in sharing God’s love.*

Our mission statement at OSWLC says, *“At Our Savior’s Way we glorify God and make disciples by: forming relationships, experiencing Jesus together, and sharing God’s love.”* This is not just a business statement. It is a map, which leads us to where the

joy is. Jesus Christ is Risen. He is risen indeed! He is our Lord, and He is our God.