

**This Sunday's texts:**

Acts 3:11-21

1 John 3:1-7

Luke 24:36-49

**My Sin**  
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**April 18, 2021**

The holy Gospel according to Luke, the twenty-fourth chapter:

And just as they were telling about it, Jesus himself was suddenly standing there among them.

“Peace be with you,” he said. But the whole group was startled and frightened, thinking they were seeing a ghost! “Why are you frightened?” Jesus asked. “Why are your hearts filled with doubt? Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it's really me. Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don't have bodies, as you see that I do.” As he spoke, he showed them his hands and his feet. Still they stood there in disbelief, filled with joy and wonder. Then he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish and he ate it as they watched. Then he said, “When I was with you before, I told you that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And he said, “Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah would suffer and die and rise from the dead on the third day. It was also written that this message would be proclaimed in the authority of his name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem: ‘There is forgiveness of sins for all who repent.’ You are witnesses of these things. And now I will send the Holy Spirit just as my Father promised. But stay here in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power from heaven.”

The gospel of the Lord. Let us pray. Lord, strengthen our faith, fill us with hope and assurance, transform our lives that we might indeed be your witnesses, and assure us of your love and forgiveness. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

I want to tell you a story. It's about a man who was new to archery. He had a good friend who was an expert and he challenged that friend to a contest. He said, “Come to my house. I want to challenge you to see who can come closer to the center of the bullseye on the target. I will even go first so that you know what you need to beat.” And so the friend comes and they go into the backyard with their bow and arrows. The friend looks up and he sees this very large white board, about 20 yards or so out. He looks at his friend and he looks again at the target. He's confused because there is no bullseye on the target. The man says, “Oh, don't worry about that.” The man gets out his arrow, puts it in the bow, reaches back, and lets the

arrow fly and it hits slightly to the right on the board. He says, "Just a minute." Then he runs out to the board, grabs a bucket of paint from behind it, and paints the target so that his arrow is right in the center of a bullseye.

Sometimes we do that in our lives. We live our lives, thinking that the bullseye, the center of the target, the rightness will simply be established by whatever it is we've done. As if there is not something to aim for. As if there's not some calculation that shows whether or not we are on target or off-target.

I want to look at this text from 1 John. It's concerning. Hear these words: "We do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is. And all who have this eager expectation will keep themselves pure just as he is pure." (1 John 3:2). Do you feel pure in your behavior, in your thoughts, in your words, in your relationships? Because I continue to fall short. But we're not done. 1 John also says this: "Jesus came to take away our sins, and there is no sin in him. Anyone who continues to live in him will not sin." (1 John 3:5-6). Wow! That's difficult. It continues: "But anyone who keeps on sinning does not know him or understand who he is. Dear children, don't let anyone deceive you about this: When people do what is right, it shows that they are righteous, even as Christ is righteous." (1 John 6-7). Anyone who keeps on sinning does not know him or understand who he is. That's convicting. All right.

Well, perhaps we need to better understand then what is sin. You know there have been times in my life when I've had this general concept of sin as being awful stuff. The worst stuff - intentional murder, abuse of innocent helpless people. When I can think of sin in those most awfullest of terms, then maybe I can feel kind of okay about myself because I haven't killed anybody and I haven't abused anybody that I'm aware of. So maybe, I'm okay. Or maybe not.

You know sometimes when I talk to people about faith, they suggest that, in comparison with others, they're pretty good. Compared to *those* people who are committing whatever sin it is that I don't like or whatever sin it is that I haven't committed, then I'm better than they are, so I'm okay.

I don't think that jives with what's going on here. There is a word in Greek that is used and translated here as sin. That word is *hamartia* and the best translation of that is probably "not to hit" or "to miss." Some people, therefore, describe sin as "to miss the mark." In the story I started with, hey it'll be great if it worked out that way. So no matter what I do, I can then paint the target around what I do, so I won't have missed the mark. But that's not how it works. That's not accepting the truth that God provides for us. That's not living in obedience to God's will and intention for us, for his people, for his world.

There's another sort of metaphorical understanding of the word *hamartia* and it's probably best set in the sense of intellectual shortcoming, intellectual error, misunderstanding of what is right or wrong. I

certainly have missed the mark in my life at times. I certainly thought and spoke and acted in ways that were not in perfect alignment with God's will. I even confessed with you, as the service started, that my life is not being lived fully in conformity to God's will for me. Whether by omission or commission, I'm a sinner.

But 1 John and the verses that we read today need to be understood within the context of the whole letter. And it was only last week in 1 John that we read "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all iniquity." (1 John 1:8-9). We're not without sin, except that our sin is forgiven and our guilt removed through the blood of Jesus.

So maybe we want to ask this question about what does it mean to confess our sin? If we confess our sin, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sin. So what is it mean to confess our sin?

By the way, we have two confessions in our worship service today. The first one is a confession of sin, an acknowledgment of the wrong we've done and the guilt that we carry, a confession that seeks forgiveness. And then after the sermon, we will have a confession of faith, that is, we will use the words of the Apostles Creed and confess what we believe. You see, the word *confess* has a double meaning. It could mean to admit to the wrongdoing of our lives, but it can also mean to profess or declare as true. And in reality, when we confess our sin, what we're saying is "Yes, it's true. I'm a sinner." Just as in the Apostles Creed, we're saying "Yes, it's true. God is this way. I believe that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, active in the life of the church." In both cases, the word *confession* is about this declaration of what we believe to be the truth, both that we are sinners and that Jesus gave his life for us.

So now what? Having acknowledged that we've missed the mark. Having acknowledged that there are times when we've been in error. "I confess that it is true. I am a sinner." What do we do now? We repent. When we see that we are not living in obedience to God, when we've done wrong or failed to do right, we repent.

Now a lot of times, I've heard throughout my life in the church that repentance means turning around and there is some truth to that, but I want us to dig a little bit deeper into the meaning of repentance today. In the New Testament, most often, when you see the word repent, it is the Greek word *metanoia*. The Greek word *metanoia* literally means a change of mind or if you want to get very literal, it's "again know" or "think again." So when we're talking about repentance, we're talking about seeing something in a new way. Or as we hear in children sermons sometimes, sometimes we give our children a timeout; that's not really intended to be a punishment; it's intended to be a time for them to reflect on what they did, to think again, so that they might see the situation and their ability to respond to it in a new

way. *Metanoia* is an opportunity for us to acknowledge that we were in error and to acknowledge that what God says is true and right and that we want to re-aim, re-know, so that we can live in conformity to the will of God.

In Acts today, it says in Acts 3:19 “Now repent of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped away.” This idea of turning to God or turning around is indeed a part of the repentant act, but in fact, it's a different word. The word here in Acts is the word *epistrepho*, to turn, to change direction, or to return. It's good to think about, as we think again, as we correct our error in judgment, then we're able to re-aim at the bullseye that God has for our lives. Not thinking that the target keeps moving to whatever we happen to do, but to begin to seek to live our lives in alignment with what God calls us to do.

One of those words we have in our Gospel today of what God calls us to do is to bring this word of the Gospel, to be a witness for Christ, to let the world know that they can repent and believe in Jesus. There is forgiveness of sins for all who repent. We are witnesses of these things. We are testifiers who confessed that we believe that this is true. That confession is first our own. We first embrace it for our own lives, not in arrogance to claim righteousness on my own, but rather in hope and in confession and in profession that forgiveness is mine through Jesus. That, while I have sinned and while I continue to miss the mark in my life, Christ, in his mercy, provides forgiveness and takes that sin away. And as we walk into the world, we don't judge the world from missing the mark, we call them to acknowledge that they have missed the mark, so that they too can receive forgiveness of sins. That they, too, can repent and receive the forgiveness that is offered in Jesus and that we bear witness to.

I also really like the way Acts ends, especially in these days coming out of the Covid experience, coming out of the isolation that has been so long and so difficult. Acts 3:20 says this. When we have repented, when we have experienced the forgiveness of our sins, the love of God that embraces are in Christ, it says “Then times of refreshment will come from the presence of the Lord.”

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, we do need to be convicted of our sins. As 1 John said in last week's reading, we must confess our sins, so that we can be embraced by the faithfulness of God to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. We cannot pretend that we are perfect or that we are better than others. We are simply bearers of Christ, his love in his forgiveness, first received for our own lives and then shared through our lives in our relationships for the world. Be refreshed. Be renewed. Be empowered by the Holy Spirit to live your life as a witness for Christ. And when you see that you've missed the mark, think again, confess your sin, and be forgiven, for we are an Easter people. Thanks be to God! Amen.