

Acts 2:14, 22-32; John 20:19-31; Psalm 16; 1 Peter 1:3-9

The Inexplicable Joy of Salvation

Happy Easter! (Happy Easter). We are celebrating Easter year round, as that is the purpose of the church. To proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and hope. We are not alone, thanks be to God. Yes this is my first spoken sermon, yes I chose probably the most complicated subject to preach on, to the point that I called it inexplicable. Let's start off easy.

How many of you are under stress, new job, starting retirement, uncertain health issues, or otherwise not sure what tomorrow may bring? How many of you have a big presentation or event coming up that you need to prepare for, and you are stressed that you cannot do it right now? What about a big project that requires your mind or a time commitment? Everyone has something that they are worried about that is coming. You know you need to prepare, you need to finish it before the time comes, and the outcome is uncertain.

Now let's think about the disciples on Holy Saturday. Holy Saturday is the day before Easter Sunday. It is usually not talked about, and very few churches even mention it, as on Good Friday we extinguish the Christ Candle, hang up the stole and shut down the church. It does not get a service, but some places the doors are open in this shut down state to allow people to enter, ponder and leave on their own time.

On the first Holy Saturday. Jesus was dead. What were the disciples doing that day? For them, it was the day of rest and Passover. They would not be able to drown their minds in work, they would have the day off, but be completely lost on what to do. The man they have been following for 3 years is dead, killed in the most gruesome way possible by the empire that conquered them a century before. Many of them were fishermen, some were tax collectors, others would be farmhands, shepherds and maybe a few salesmen. These are not people with a major fallback plan or cushion to land on when everything fell apart.

They were completely lost. All together in hiding trying to come up with a solution for what to do with their lives now that their teacher is gone.

The next day, Easter, Mary Magdalene, John and Simon Peter went to the tomb. John and Simon Peter saw that it was empty, and believed that he was risen, but they had not seen him. Mary did see Jesus, though, originally thinking he was the gardener, but when He called her by name, she knows it is Jesus.

Mary ran back and told the others that she has seen Jesus, alive! Now think, these people had their entire lives called into question for the last 3 days, how would they be feeling now? Overjoyed, doubtful, stressed. Two of the 12 of them said they saw that Jesus was not there, the stone was rolled away, and Mary now claims to have seen him.

Later that week, Jesus appears behind locked doors to all of the disciples. They have seen the Lord! He has entered into their midst and talks with them, showing the wounds and also gifting them the Holy Spirit. At this point, the moment of clarity would have come to them. All of the hints Jesus dropped about how he was to die and rise again would snap them to clarity. The joy of seeing their teacher and friend alive and well, and physically present would have compounded with the revelation that their

future is secured. There is eternal life awaiting for them, and they get to remain in the presence of Jesus, and God.

Isn't this amazing! This moment, the moment of revelation, the "A HA!" moment of salvation is what I am talking about. This moment of realizing that through Jesus, our future beyond earth and time are secured.

Some of you probably feel relieved; others are probably more like Thomas. Thomas was not there the first time Jesus revealed himself to the disciples. We do not know where he was, maybe getting food as they are all in hiding. He would have been in the mood of Holy Saturday for days now. Stuck between the future and the past. Lost between what was supposed to happen, and what occurred. He would have been told by the other disciples that Jesus appeared to them, yet he does not want to get his hopes up. He abandoned everything in his life to follow Jesus, and look where it led him. He is moping around, and has lost trust in all people. He is afraid. Afraid of what is to come, of the future, and of what might happen. Remember, all of them are still hiding together out of the fear of being associated with Jesus. He even states aloud "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

Jesus then appears to him, and specifically calls out Thomas to see and feel the marks of the nails and put his hand in his side to show that Jesus is physically real, is alive, yet also proves that he can hear them without being physically present.

This is Jesus, standing there, reaching out to meet them. The joy of Thomas after seeing the risen Lord, seeing that even though he doubted, the spark of hope kept him going, and now he is overfilled with joy as now he gets to see Jesus, and gets a glimpse of understanding the forgiveness and salvation that Jesus brings.

The stories and history that they learned as kids, all prophesies of the coming saviour and the restoration with God has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. From humbly entering the city, born of nobody except a long descendent of David, being raised up like the serpent of Moses, and taking the sins of the earth, and redefining the government so that it shall be on his shoulders. All has been fulfilled. The Great Narrative has hit its ultimate climax. All the points over recorded human history, from Adam and Eve's initial fall, to Noah on the Ark, to Abraham's descendants, to Mosaic covenants, to King David, to all of the prophets hit its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. The joy of the epic is here, and we are to celebrate it weekly. To recharge our faith, to realize who we are, to see that our future is secure with Jesus, we do not have to worry about life beyond death. God is with us, and we are with God.

This moment of inexplicable joy of salvation is what many people have called upon to start their message. Peter, as in Simon Peter was no different. After the Holy Spirit came to them and had the disciples speak in various tongues to carry the message of Jesus far and wide, Peter spoke to the gathered crowd. Peter exclaimed "This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him." David wrote about the risen saviour in the Psalms, and prophesized through music after seeing the joy of salvation himself and needing to express it in the way he knew how: through music. He wrote of seeing Jesus risen, and alive. Death has lost its victory and its sting. We no longer need to fear it. We are to be with God.

Peter, again Simon Peter later wrote a letter describing the same feeling to exiles in Christ. Being Christian in the early church was not easy. But the message of salvation and forgiveness pulled them through. "Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

This is where we are today, the church is changing, but the core message is the same. The church is becoming an external force of extreme difference from mainstream, but it has always worked its miracles of faith, hope, uplifting Good News and salvation when on the edge. Let us celebrate and worship God with open arms and eyes, ready and waiting to be guided as we now know the path he taught, and know the leader to guide us onwards in his way, as his way is The Way.

Let us pray, and in the moment of silence, take time. Take time to find this inexplicable joy of salvation. Some people may have experienced it in music, in prayer, or during the sermon. Take time also during the silence.

Loving God, thank you. Thank you for the gift of salvation offered freely by you to us through your son Jesus Christ. Help us to remember that every Sunday is a little Easter. Help us to spend time to grasp the great love you have for all people, and how you want to change us to meet your design for creation. Open our eyes to see you. Open our ears to hear you once again. <Silence>. In the name of the saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen