

Luke 24:36-49

April 14, 2024

Everyone loves resurrection, but who loves death? Easter is more popular than Good Friday. Yet there can be no resurrection without death. To rise from death, you first have to die. We could not celebrate Easter had there been no Good Friday.

What is true of death and resurrection is true of repentance and forgiveness. Listen to how Jesus puts these together in our text: *“Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations...”*

Just as resurrection is more popular than death, so is forgiveness more popular than repentance. Who loves to repent? Not us. At least not the Old Adam in us; our sinful flesh. I don't know about your Old Adam, but mine would rather die than repent.

And that is exactly what must happen to mine and to yours. Jesus had to die in order to rise from the dead. And so with us. For us to rise from death, we first must die. And I don't mean just out there in the cemetery. That also. For our bodies to be raised by Jesus on the Last Day, our bodies must first die and be buried. But there is a death that must occur before that death. The Old Adam in us must die. And this is called repentance.

You learned this back in catechism class. “By daily contrition and repentance, the Old Adam in us is drowned and dies with all sins and evil desires.” You can't have resurrection without death. Nor can you have forgiveness without repentance. If someone refuses to repent and turn away from their sins, the Old Adam in him or her will not die. And what this means is that he or she will not be raised with Christ with sins forgiven, not now, and not on the Last Day. There must be death for there to be resurrection. And there must be repentance for there to be the forgiveness of sins.

This is why Jesus says that “repentance and forgiveness of sins in His name is to be proclaimed.” John the Baptist proclaimed it. Jesus proclaimed it. And He commands His apostles here in our text to proclaim it. And all who follow in their train, including the pastor standing before you. Jesus, right here in our text, tells me, and all who preach, exactly what is to be preached: *“Repentance and forgiveness of sins.”*

And the way this is worded is that these are to be preached not once, or twice, but continuously. Repentance is not a “one-and-done.” It's daily. That Old Adam in us has more lives than a mangy old cat. Repentance must be our daily life. We live a life of repentance. You know how it is. You put evil lust to death one day, and the next, but there it is again alive and well. And that mangy old cat has grown up into a full-sized lion that pounces on you and overtakes you. I see it in my life, and you see it in yours.

Jesus died once on the cross, this is true. And yet He is and remains the Crucified One. St. Paul says that he preaches, not Christ Resurrected, but *“Christ Crucified.”* And so with us. You died with Christ in your baptism. But your baptism is not just a past event. It is an ever-present reality. We return to our baptism day after day through repentance. Those waters are always there for you to drown, again and again, that mangy and wicked Old Adam in you.

And thank God for this because in our baptism, says St. Paul, not only do we die with Christ, we are raised with Him. This is the beautiful thing about death and resurrection. Resurrection follows death. There is no way possible that Jesus would not rise from the dead on the third day. It was impossible for Him not to be resurrected. The Scriptures had to be fulfilled, and the Scriptures said He would rise. And also this, Jesus had committed no sin, and so death could not keep Him in its grasp. Death had to release Him. Resurrection had to follow death for Jesus.

And also for you, my friend, also for you. Jesus flat out commands His preachers to proclaim, not just repentance, but also forgiveness of sins. Where there is repentance, forgiveness is to follow. As certain as Jesus rose from the dead, so certain is it that your sins are forgiven. The beauty of Easter is two-fold. You will be raised from death on the Last Day just as Jesus was raised. And also this, you are raised from the death of sin today, now, because your sins are all forgiven. You are, right now, living the resurrected life with Jesus. And this is pretty wonderful. Let me show you.

In our text we see Jesus, who had died, standing alive with His disciples. Does He look like death? Do they smell death on Him? No. He is raised from death. His resurrection completely removed from Him the stench of death.

And so has yours. The forgiveness of your sins raises you from death to life. So complete is this resurrection that there is no stench of sin left in you. In the eyes and the nostrils of God, you are holy, innocent, and spotless, for He has declared you forgiven of all sin for the sake of Jesus.

Now there may be someone, even after hearing this good news, who is not assured; who is not convinced that his or her sin is truly forgiven. This poor sinner could very well be asking himself or herself this question: Am I truly repentant? Because without repentance there is no forgiveness. Maybe, (this person is pondering), Maybe I'm not repentant enough because I keep going back to my sinful ways. If I really was repentant, I would not keep going back to my sins, would I?

How would you respond to such a person? With pure Gospel, yes, with pure comfort in Jesus Christ. If someone is not repentant, that one would never even ask such a question. It is the one who is not repentant who doesn't worry if they are repentant or not. The one who is not repentant does not care whether his sins are forgiven or not. To have concerns about repentance and forgiveness is a sure sign that the Holy Spirit is at work, because repentance is not our work; it is the work of the Holy Spirit within us.

Do not judge whether you are forgiven by how you live. Do you keep going back to your sins? Then rejoice that you have a Savior to keep going to for forgiveness, and that your baptism is always there to receive you into Jesus loving embrace.

There is no one, and I mean no one, who should leave here today wondering if his or her sins are truly forgiven. You are forgiven. You are all forgiven. Leave with assurance. Your assurance is not in how you live, but that Jesus lives, and He is Resurrection and Life for you today, and on the Last Day. Amen.