

Luke 24:36-49

The visible light spectrum is a very narrow band of light waves. On the one side are radio waves and microwaves - the ones we cook with. On the other side are ultraviolet waves and X-ray waves. We cannot see these with our eyes. The only light waves we can see are those found in the middle. A tiny area known as visible light.

I lead us into our text for today in this way because the way we believe tends to resemble the way we see. The Risen Lord Jesus appeared to His disciples on Easter evening. "*Peace be to you,*" He told them. But they were startled and frightened. They did not believe it was Jesus, but thought that they were seeing a spirit, a ghost. Even after giving the disciples convincing proofs, they still did not believe, but not because of fear anymore, but because of joy. Their "faith spectrum" - that which they believed, was as narrow and tiny as the spectrum of visible light. At first they disbelieve out of fear. And after, they disbelieve out of joy.

We act in the same way. We refuse to believe something because it's simply too awful, too horrible to be true. But we also refuse to believe something because it's simply too good to be true. That which we believe is a tiny, narrow band somewhere in the middle of these two.

But this presents a problem. Jesus told His disciples that "*Repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations...*" Repentance and forgiveness. Law and Gospel. Sin and grace. Were we to place these on our faith spectrum, the one is too awful to believe that it's true, and the other is too good to believe that it's true. That which we want to believe is somewhere in the middle.

I've seen people get up and walk out of church -- once even at a funeral -- when repentance was being preached. And even if we are disciplined enough not to walk out, we may physically sit in the pew but our ears may leave the building. It offends us to hear the Law of God. We like hearing the bad things our neighbor does, but we disagree with God when His preacher points the accusing finger at us. We don't believe it. We do not accept it as true that we are just as sinful as everyone else; as sinful as the worst sinner in the neighborhood.

What's more, we don't accept as true what God says in the Bible that our sins -- even the smallest sin in our eyes -- earns for us eternal damnation in hell. Why, that's too bad to be true! It doesn't fit anywhere on our faith spectrum. It's not what we want to accept as true, so we don't believe it. "There's good in everyone," we want to think, "even in the worst of the worst. God surely wouldn't damn those who have some good in them."

Let me ask you this...why would Jesus command His disciples to preach repentance if it was unnecessary to do so? If our sin is not that big of a problem, why does Jesus command that we are to hear God's accusing Law so that we repent of it? Repent! Repent of your sins. Repent of your desire to excuse them.

God's accusing Law does not fit on our faith spectrum. We do not want to accept as true that we, yes, I myself, deserve eternal punishment. That's why repentance is not something that you and I are capable of doing on our own. Through His Word, God's Holy Spirit enters our hearts and convicts us. Out of mercy, He shows us the enormity of even our tiniest sins. He points us to the cross where the bloody death of God Himself tells us that this is what our sin caused. Those nail marks in Jesus' hands and feet remind us that something that was too horrible to be true did in fact happen. God died for His creature's sin.

"*Proclaim,*" says Jesus, "*Repentance and forgiveness of sins.*" Just as surely as we do not want to believe the enormity of our sin, we struggle in believing the enormity of God's grace. On Easter evening the disciples struggled. They didn't believe anything anymore, except that it surely was not Jesus standing before them. But look at what Jesus does. He is patient with them. He says, "*Touch Me...See My hands and feet...wrap your hands around Me. Feel My bones, and muscles, and flesh.*" And then He ate a piece of broiled fish in their sight.

Why was it so important that the disciples believe that this was truly Jesus risen from the dead? Because this is proof of God's grace. This is evidence of sins forgiven. The disciples felt the Law. They were huddled in fear. They needed the Gospel. And here it is--the Gospel appears to them in the flesh--in the flesh of their Risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Where does God's grace fit on your faith spectrum? I have never seen someone walk out of church when the forgiveness of sins was being preached. This is God's Word that is good to hear. It offends our sinful flesh to believe that we need forgiveness; that we are unable to patch up our own mistakes with God. Nonetheless, the word of grace that comes through the Risen Christ is appealing on the surface. Just look at how churches bloat with people on Easter Sunday.

Believing, however, involves more than just making an appearance in church. We are much like the disciples on Easter evening. The Risen Lord was standing before them, but they did not believe. We're like that. The Risen Christ stands before us, and through the mouth of His pastor, proclaims that our sins are forgiven. He stands before us in bread and wine on the altar and says, "*Peace be to you.*" But this is beyond our faith spectrum. It's too good to be true.

But Jesus is patient also with us. He knows what we need. Our sins beat us up through the week. On Sunday morning we need God's grace. We feel the Law in our life. Here we need the Gospel. That's why He is here -- as proof that God is gracious to you, as evidence of sins forgiven...your sins.

Jesus commands that forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in His name because through that proclamation, the Holy Spirit works faith in you to believe it. Do all believe? No, otherwise our churches would be bloated every Sunday. But today...right at this moment, God wants you to believe that the Risen Christ is here before you and that, on account of Him, and through Him, your sins are forgiven. All of them. However enormous your sin is, God's grace is bigger than your sin. There is nothing in your past that disqualifies you. Look at the cross of your Lord. Yes, your sin and mine caused that, but the fact that God died for you is your deliverance, and His resurrection on the third day is your salvation. Here on the altar are the marks in His hands and feet, for here is His crucified and risen body for you. Here is His blood which poured out of these wounds and now is given for you for the remission of your sins.

Is this too good to be true? Absolutely, yes it is! And so the fact that you believe it is proof, evidence that God's Holy Spirit is at work in you. God is greater than your unbelief. As He caused the disciples to believe, and then to act on their faith, even to die in their faith--so the Risen Christ enters your heart and opens your mind. He grants you to believe what is impossible for us to accept as true. And believing, you have life in His name.

It's all too good--God forgives every sin of yours, God is at peace with you through the Risen Christ, you have a gracious God now and on the day you die, you have the hope of eternal life in Christ. But all this you believe through the power of Him who is within you. "Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!" Amen.