

“I Am a Poor Miserable Sinner”

1 John 1:1-2:2

Christ is risen!! He is risen indeed!! Alleluia!!

Those words from St. John, “I we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us,” are probably familiar as they are a part of the opening liturgy of what is known as Divine Service Setting I – which we used last week in our rotation.

We are so blessed to be part of the richness of the liturgical life of our church. It is a wonderful thing that the Holy Spirit has guided people throughout the years to construct liturgies that are based upon Scripture itself. However, we can read something or say something so often that we lose sight of the value or the meaning of what we are saying.

In our liturgy this morning, we all confessed that we are “poor, miserable sinners”. Especially when I am out visiting the shut-ins, because there I do the liturgy from memory, I often finish saying those words and think to myself, “what did I just say? I don’t remember doing a certain part of the liturgy.” (It’s like wandering into a room and thinking, “What did I come in here for?”) Or, we will be sitting at the dinner table and someone will ask, “Did we pray?” It is one of the reasons that, during the worship service, I read the confession of sin, and the Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer. I know them from memory, but the visible words help to keep my mind from wandering.

Now don't get me wrong, I believe that it is OK for the words of liturgy or Scripture or a hymn or a sermon to occasionally cause our minds to wander as we ponder the work and Word of our Lord. But it is also important that we focus our attention on the actual words and work.

We look at the words of St. John, "if we say we have no sin"; if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. That is, if we say that we have no sin, then we are lying to ourselves and trying to lie to God, which never works because He knows all things.

There is not one person here today; and of course this applies also to those who are not here today; but there is not one person who has walked the face of this earth, other than Jesus Christ, who could honestly say, "I am a genuinely good person." At least according to God's standards no one could say that. According to the world's standards lots of people try to say that, but then the world doesn't have very high standards.

The world judges only according to the lowest common denominator. We are told that as long as we can look around and see people doing worse things than we do, then we can feel pretty good about ourselves. The pop psychologists tell us that we are all supposed to say: "I'm OK. You're OK."

God tells the people of the world: "You're not OK. And because you're not OK, I needed to send My Son to suffer and die on your behalf. What I want you to say is not 'I'm OK,' but that 'I am a poor miserable sinner who has sinned in thought, word, and deed. I intend to amend my ways and turn from the sinful way in which I have been acting.' Please forgive me."

God's standards are very different from human standards. Human standards tell us to look at other people and say that "as long as can I convince myself that I am as good or better than the people sitting around me, then I must be OK with God also."

But God says: "If you break the least of My commandments, you have broken them all. You are no better than anyone else, and the only reason that you are at all pleasing in my sight is because I have mercifully washed away all of your sins just as I promised."

God does take sin very seriously. He is very displeased when we ignore His will or desire for our lives. However, what John is writing in his letter is good news. It is good news that we cannot claim to be without sin. If there was the most remote chance that we could keep all of God's commandments or somehow make up for the things that we have done wrong, then God would demand that of us, and we would all be in a great deal of trouble. He wouldn't have sent Jesus.

Instead, God has told us to "repent, turn away from your sins, and I will heal you." Don't bother lying to yourself or trying to lie to God by making the claim that on your own somehow you are the possessor of some spark of goodness. The only spark of goodness that exists in your heart has been kindled by the Holy Spirit through no help of your own. It is a gift.

We know, because of our sinful human nature with our imperfect bodies living in an evil world full of temptation, that we are going to have problems. We are going to fall far short of the glory of God.

But as I said before, there is good news in the words of St. John.

John writes, “if anyone does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – our advocate, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. He is the propitiation, the One who satisfies the justified anger which God has toward our sin.”

For our sake, the Son of God was born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into Hell, and on the third day He rose again from dead; He ascended into Heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; where as John tells us, He speaks to the Father in our defense.

Our relationship with God is that we are accused criminals and He is our Judge. But in God’s court, when people throw themselves on the mercy of the court, we find mercy. When a person in humility says, “I am a poor miserable sinner...I deserve both present and eternal punishment, but I am heartily sorry for my sins and sincerely repent of them,” Jesus intervenes on our behalf, acts as our defense attorney, and tells the Judge, “This person should not be punished; not that he is innocent, but because the punishment for his guilt has already been suffered by Me.” And we are declared not guilty. We are declared righteous in His sight. That is how forgiveness works. Amen.

Christ is risen!! He is risen indeed!! Alleluia!!

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.