

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church  
Quincy, IL  
Rev. Martin Eden

Easter 3 – “Here I Stand” Sunday  
Saturday, April 17, 2021 at 5:00 p.m.  
Sunday, April 18, 2021 at 9:00 a.m.

# “You Are Witnesses of These Things”

Luke 24:36-49

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

Today is a special anniversary for the church in general and for the Lutheran Church in particular. From April 16-18 in the year 1521, Martin Luther was in Worms, Germany as he had been summoned to an Imperial Diet – a gathering of the leadership of the Holy Roman Empire presided over by the Emperor Charles V. A year earlier, Pope Leo X had excommunicated Luther, and now he was summoned to stand before the Emperor and either recant (take back) all of his writings and teachings or face the consequences.

It is important to understand just what those consequences were. 100 years earlier, Jan Hus was “invited” to stand before the emperor and defend his criticisms of the Roman Church. Hus was promised “safe conduct” to and from the Council of Constance in 1415. Instead, they arrested him and burned him at the stake along with one of his companions.

Luther is promised “safe conduct” to and from the Diet. When he speaks before these men and bears witness of the necessity of salvation by grace through faith alone, he does so with the realistic assumption that these would be his last public words.

In our first reading this morning, we hear the words of Peter who testified before the people of Jerusalem as a witness of the life, death, and resurrection of

Jesus. “The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His servant Jesus, whom you delivered and denied in the presence of Pilate. . . You denied the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer [Barabbas, to be released], and you killed the Author of life.” We are witnesses that God raised Him from the dead.

We are witnesses of these things. This is legal language. We are willing to testify under oath. We are willing to stand before judges and kings and emperors. We are willing to die rather than change our testimony, because our testimony is true. Our testimony is the difference between life and death. Peter could have said, as Luther famously said, “I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. Here I stand. I can do no other. May God help me. Amen.”

In the days following the resurrection, the disciples demonstrate a willingness to tell others about Jesus’ rising from the dead – no matter what the consequences are. This is very different from how the disciples responded to stress before the resurrection.

Before Jesus rose from the dead, Peter denied even knowing Him – three times. They reject Jesus’ notion that there is persecution, suffering, and death waiting for Him and, later on, them – as they will also drink the cup of suffering. The apostles were most concerned with securing the most important positions or positions of power and honor in Jesus’ kingdom. After Jesus is arrested, the disciples hide out in a locked room for fear that they might be the next ones nailed to a cross.

You would think that seeing and hearing and touching the resurrected Lord would be what changes them, but it isn’t. The real change only happens for the disciples when He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And everything written about Him in Moses and Prophets and the Psalms was made clear.

Then, and only then did all of these things make sense. Only after He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures did the disciples understand what Jesus had told them – how He would be betrayed into the hands of scribes and chief priests, and be handed over to the Romans, and be mocked and beaten and spit upon and nailed to a cross.

Only then did the words of Scripture from the Old Testament concerning the suffering of the Son of Man and the references to Him being pierced, like in Psalm 22 or Zechariah 12 or Isaiah 53, finally make sense.

Only after Scripture was opened to them did they remember what He had said about being raised up on the third day, that the only sign He would give would be the sign of Jonah – just as he was three days in the belly of the fish, so the Son of Man will be three days in the belly of the earth. Only now, after the resurrection, do the disciples understand what Jesus meant about destroying the “temple,” and in three days He will raise it up again.

Martin Luther, too, was not just strengthened and given confidence by the Word of God, but he knew hiding away the Gospel left a soul in a terrible place. In 1519, just two years after posting the 95 Theses and two years before the Diet of Worms, while studying Paul’s letter to the Romans, Luther had an epiphany while pondering the phrase, “the righteousness of God is revealed.”

He said, “Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God, and said, “As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the Decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath!” Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience. . .

At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, "In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.'" There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me. Thereupon I ran through the Scriptures from memory. I also found in other terms an analogy, as, the work of God, that is, what God does in us, the power of God, with which he makes us strong, the wisdom of God, with which he makes us wise, the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God.

And I extolled my sweetest word with a love as great as the hatred with which I had before hated the word "righteousness of God." Thus that place in Paul was for me truly the gate to paradise (AE 34:336-337).

The Word of God, the righteousness of God revealed in the Gospel is truly the gate to paradise. Luther would never recant, never go back to the gospel where there is no Gospel. As Luther also said at the Diet of Worms, "If I now recant these, then, I would be doing nothing but strengthening tyranny."

As we remember these events from 500 years ago, our task is to be witnesses of that message of grace and peace. And we pray the Holy Spirit continues to work through His means of grace and open minds to understand the Scriptures. Whatever sphere of influence you have and whatever the consequences may come in regard to proclaiming the Kingdom of God, through your words and through your actions, you are witnesses of these things. Join with Luther and proclaim, "Here I stand. I can do no other. May God help me. Amen." Christ is risen!! He is risen indeed!! Alleluia!!