

Sermon followed by Service

April 14, 2024

1 John 1 - 2:2

This past Monday, millions of people stopped what they were doing to see what happens when the dark eclipses the light. I don't know what you saw, but what I saw was this - as darkness shaded the light, things looked and felt strange, abnormal, out-of-sorts. But in the end, what happened - light wins!

Light wins. It doesn't always look that way. We don't always act or think that way. It can be so tempting to take a walk into the darkness, and then so easy to settle for the darkness, to get stuck and stay stuck in the darkness of this world. As John wrote our lesson today, John knew what the darkness of this world can do. John had seen and heard the darkness of this world on Good Friday, not just the darkness in the sky, but the darkness in man's heart, darkness determined to get rid of the Light that was exposing their darkness, darkness determined to eclipse the light, darkness determined to be seen and heard and felt. John had felt the darkness touch him, handle him, manhandle him, as the forces of darkness tried to bully him into keeping quiet about Jesus. John knew what the powers of darkness could do - his fellow disciple Judas swallowed by the darkness, his brother James beheaded, the rest of the Twelve all killed. And now, as John wrote our lesson, John knew the power of darkness as people he was pastoring were denying who Jesus is. People he was pastoring were choosing to reject, ignore, blow off God's commands, saying that as long as you know God in your head, it doesn't matter what you do. John knew the power of darkness - he had seen the power of darkness kill his Savior, his family and friends. And now he was seeing the power of darkness infiltrate and poison his church.

Can you imagine how that felt for John to see what darkness was doing to his people? People he had introduced to Jesus denying Jesus. People he had taught turning their backs thinking they knew better. Can you imagine how that felt for John? It hurts, doesn't it?

John knew the powers of darkness; he saw what darkness was doing to the church and the people he loved. But what do we hear from John? We don't hear the darkness of defeat. We don't hear the darkness of a rant. We sure don't hear

the darkness of silence. Instead, we hear the light of joy - the joy of living in the light of Jesus, and the hoped-for joy of seeing his people live in the light of Jesus.

After all the darkness in his life, how could John talk about joy? He had seen the light! He had seen Jesus and heard Jesus and touched Jesus. He had seen and heard and hugged the Son of God. He had seen and heard and held on to the Word of life, the Word of eternal Easter life. With Jesus, he knew that whatever darkness did to him in this world, with Jesus he would live in the light of God forever. Think of heaven. What do you look forward to the most in heaven? It puts a smile on our heart, doesn't it?

With Jesus, John got to see himself enjoying life with God in heaven. But that's not what made John's joy complete. After seeing and hearing and touching Jesus for himself, John got to share that Word of life. He got to share the Word with people touched by the dark. He got to share the Word of life with people sneaking and peeking into the dark. He got to share the Word of life with people wandering in the dark. He got to share the Word of life with the hope and confidence that the Word would work ... and that people touched by the dark would shrug off the darkness and stay safe in the hug of Jesus ... that people peeking into the dark would turn away and turn back to Jesus ... that people wandering in the dark would listen and follow John's call back to the light of Jesus. For John, having the people in his life join him with Jesus - that's what would make his joy complete.

So what does John do? He shines. He doesn't go dark in defeat. He doesn't go dark on a rant against darkness. He doesn't go dark and silent in the face of darkness. He shines and he speaks up. **“God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.”**

Doesn't that shine? Our God isn't dark and brooding. Our God isn't petty and vindictive. Our God isn't a liar or a cheat. Our God isn't a jerk or a racist or a misogynist. Our God doesn't find joy or satisfaction in seeing us hurt. Our God isn't confused and in the dark. Our God is filled with, he oozes with, he overflows with light and life, love and peace, kindness and goodness, faithfulness and truth.

That sound so good, doesn't it? But it raises a problem. What about the darkness in me? What about the darkness in you? We might want to tell ourselves ... we might want to tell others: "God will understand." Or "Your darkness isn't that big a deal; you're not hurting anybody." Or "You're doing more good than evil." Sure, God may understand, and your darkness or their darkness may not be that big a deal in a world of darkness, and you may be saying more nice things than nasty things. But blaming and excusing and pretending that our sin shouldn't matter to God doesn't make it so. **"God is light; in him there is no darkness at all."** God and sin do not and can not mix.

So if I think I can continue to walk in the darkness of my sin, and walk with God at the same time - I'm fooling myself. If I think I can redefine my sin into "no big deal" or "their fault" or "acceptable" - I'm fooling myself.

With Jesus, John has a better answer for the darkness in us. With Jesus, we have a better answer for the darkness in us. Instead of walking in the dark, **"walk in the light"** with Jesus. And as we walk in the light of Jesus, what promise does John have for us? What promise do we get to share with others? **"If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."** Walking with Jesus, we get to shine forgiven with Jesus.

But what do we know? As long as we're in this world, in our walk with Jesus, we trip and stumble and wander into the dark, don't we?

Again, John has an answer for us. Instead of doing what the darkness does, instead of lie and deny, blame and excuse, we have a better answer - we get to confess our sins. And what promise does John have for us? What promise do we get to share with others? **"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."** As we confess our sins, we get to know - God will forgive our sins - all of them!

Let me confess something. John uses a word I don't like - "if." **"If we walk with Jesus."** **"If we confess our sins."** That word "if" puts a cloud of darkness in my head. No, I shouldn't say that. I should say it this way - that word "if" exposes the darkness in my heart. In this world, as I walk with Jesus, there's a part of me that prefers the dark. As I confess my sins, there's a part of me that

wants to hold on to my sin. John uses that word “if” to keep us focused on walking with Jesus, to keep us willing to confess. But he doesn’t leave us wondering “if.” John adds: **“My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”**

Better than your walk with God, you have the Jesus who walks right with God. Better than your confession, you have Jesus speaking up for you to the Father in heaven. And he’s not making excuses for us or blaming someone else or anything like that. He’s pointing to the cross. On the cross, **“It is finished”** - his sacrifice, his atoning sacrifice, paid for your sin and set you at one, right with God. And now with Easter, you have the Jesus and the Father calling you right by God and right for heaven.

What does that get to mean for us? Instead of walking in the dark, alone and on our own, we get to walk through life with Jesus and the Father. Instead of living in the dark of this world, we get to live in the light of God. And like John, to make our joy complete, we get to share that promise, that light, that life - so that more and more can walk with us, with Jesus and the Father. Amen.

DIVINE SERVICE II

IN OUR WORLD TODAY ... people are thirsting and starving for Good News, True News, Life-saving and Life-changing News. Some in their thirst and hunger settle for any news that sounds good to them, and are left thirsting and starving. Some in their thirst and hunger deny the Good News as good.

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... we hear the Good News that our world needs - and we rejoice! Not only is the Good News of Easter for us, but we also get to share the Good News with others!

OPENING HYMN

"He's Risen, He's Risen"

Hymn 445

He's risen, he's risen, Christ Jesus, the Lord;
he opened death's prison, the incarnate Word.
Break forth, hosts of heaven, in jubilant song
and earth, sea, and mountain, the praises prolong.

The foe was triumphant when on Calvary
the Lord of creation was nailed to the tree.
In Satan's domain did the hosts shout and jeer,
for Jesus was slain, whom the evil ones fear.

But short was their triumph; the Savior arose,
and death, hell, and Satan he vanquished, his foes.
The conquering Lord lifts his banner on high;
he lives, yes, he lives, and will nevermore die.

O, where is your sting, death? We fear you no more;
Christ rose, and now open is fair Eden's door.
For all our transgressions his blood does atone;
redeemed and forgiven, we now are his own.

Then sing your hosannas and raise your glad voice;
proclaim the blest tidings that all may rejoice.
Laud, honor, and praise to the Lamb that was slain:
with Father and Spirit he ever shall reign.

INVOCATION

M: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen.**

CONFESSION

M: Dear friends, let us approach God with a true heart and confess our sins, asking him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to forgive us.

C: **Lord of life, I confess that I am by nature dead in sin.
For faithless worrying and selfish pride,
For sins of habit and sins of choice,
For the evil I have done and the good I have failed to do,
I deserve to be cast away from your presence forever.
O Lord, I am sorry for my sins. Forgive me, for Jesus' sake.**

ABSOLUTION

M: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. In his great mercy, God made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in our sins. Hear the word of Christ through his called servant: I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen.**

LORD, HAVE MERCY (*Kyrie*)

M: In peace, let us pray to the Lord.

For the well-being of all people everywhere, that they may receive from you all they need to sustain body and life, hear our prayer, O Lord.

C: **Lord, have mercy.**

M: For the spread of your life-giving gospel throughout the world, that all who are lost in sin may be brought to faith in you, hear our prayer, O Christ.

C: **Christ, have mercy.**

M: For patience and perseverance in this life, that we may not lose the hope of heaven as we await your return, hear our prayer, O Lord.

C: **Lord, have mercy.**

M: Lord of life, live in us that we may live for you.

C: **Amen.**

HYMN

"This Is the Feast"
Hymn 938
(No refrain after vs. 3)

Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain,
whose blood set us free to be people of God.
This is the feast of victory for our God. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

Power, riches, wisdom, and strength,
and honor, blessing, and glory are his.
This is the feast of victory for our God. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

Sing with all the people of God, and join in the hymn of all creation:

Blessing, honor, glory, and might be to God and the Lamb forever. Amen.
This is the feast of victory for our God. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

For the Lamb who was slain has begun his reign. Alleluia!
This is the feast of victory for our God. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Holy Spirit, God and Lord, keep us ever mindful of the fields ripe for harvest here and throughout the world. Give our members a deep passion for the welfare of others and great courage to witness your lifesaving truth to friends, family members, and coworkers. Establish gospel outreach as an immovable pillar of our congregation's ministry. Make us eager to invest our talents and offerings in evangelism efforts so that many more may be won for your kingdom through faith in Jesus Christ, the Savior of all people. **Amen.**

READING*1 John 1:1–2:2*

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

PSALM OF THE DAY*Psalm 118A**Refrain*

This is the day the LORD has made, let us re-joice and be glad!



This is the day the LORD has made, let us re-joice and be glad!

When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence.

He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise be to you, O Christ!**

APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY

"Christ the Lord Is Risen Again"

Hymn 459

Christ the Lord is ris'n again; Christ has broken death's strong chain.
Hark, the angels shout for joy, singing evermore on high: Hallelujah!

He who gave for us his life, who for us endured the strife,
is our Paschal Lamb today. We too sing for joy and say: Hallelujah!

He who bore all pain and loss comfortless upon the cross
lives in glory now on high, pleads for us, and hears our cry: Hallelujah!

He whose path no records tell has descended into hell;
he the strong man armed has bound and in highest heav'n is crowned.
Hallelujah!

He who slumbered in the grave is exalted now to save;
now through Christendom it rings that the Lamb is King of kings.
Hallelujah!

Now he bids us tell abroad how the lost may be restored,
how the penitent forgiv'n, how we, too, may enter heav'n. Hallelujah!

SERMON

HYMN

"Good News of God Above"

Hymn 905

Good news of God above is ours to tell abroad,
the Father's everlasting love in Christ the risen Lord.
For neighbors near and far the seed of life is sown;
then spread the seed by word and deed to make the Savior known.

The love of Christ proclaim, who left his home on high;
to live our human life he came, our human death to die.
The Father's only Son became the sinners' friend,
our lot to share, our sin to bear, and death's dominion end.

The Lord of glory lives! From cross and death and grave
his own abundant life he gives to those he died to save.
His righteousness and peace declare from sea to sea;
his praises sound the world around for Christ has made us free.

Hear now the Master's word to those who bear his name:
"So send I you," till all have heard, "make known, declare, proclaim!"
Go forth in all the earth; embrace the path he trod
with Christ beside as friend and guide to bring good news of God.

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Eternal God and Father, we thank you for the blessings we share as members of your holy Church, for your gracious Word and sacraments, for opportunities to worship and to grow in faith and knowledge, for occasions to serve and be served, and for fellowship with believers in our congregation and our synod.

Help us rejoice in these blessings, dear Lord, and use them faithfully.

Jesus Christ, Lord of the Church, you give grace to your people by calling us to be your witnesses in the world. Open our eyes to see the great and noble mission that lies before us. In the hurting eyes of the lonely, in the pained eyes of the sick, and in the searching eyes of the lost, help us to see your face, Lord Jesus, and to serve others as we would serve you.

Awaken us to opportunities to proclaim your message of love.

Holy Spirit, giver of life, through Word and sacrament bestow on us the wisdom and power we need to witness clearly and to act boldly. Help us to speak the truth in love, to give the reason for the hope we have, and to conduct ourselves with gentleness and respect.

Set our hearts on fire as we work and witness for Christ.

Hear us, Lord, as we pray for a family member, a neighbor, or a friend who does not believe in you, or whose faith is weak or troubled.

Silent prayer

Keep in your care those who are enduring chronic pain and incessant unhappiness, those enduring rejection and struggling with poverty, those mourning the loss of someone they loved. [Especially bless... *here name the person and the cause of the petition.*] Bring healing and help and comfort and calm to everyone in distress.

Move us to act alone or join with others to provide help and support.

Bless the Church with men and women who are willing to proclaim your Word in places where we cannot go. Keep them and their loved ones in your care and let nothing hinder their work. By the power of the gospel, restore their spirits each day, so that they do not lose heart as they serve us and others.

Move us to support them with our sincere prayers and generous offerings.

Wherever your Word is proclaimed, O Lord, grant it success. Let your kingdom come to us and others, so that we and many more might join the assembly of saints and angels to sing your praise forever.

Savior of all, hear our prayer and help us in our mission. Amen.

PRAYER AND LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

BLESSING

M: The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace. Amen.

CLOSING HYMN

"The Day of Resurrection"

Hymn 450

The day of resurrection! Earth, tell it out abroad,
the passover of gladness, the passover of God.
From death to life eternal, from earth unto the sky,
our Christ has brought us over with hymns of victory.

Our hearts be pure from evil that we may see aright
the Lord in rays eternal of resurrection light
and, list'ning to his accents, may hear, so calm and plain,
his own "All hail!" and, hearing, may raise the victor strain.

Now let the heav'ns be joyful, let earth her song begin,
let all the world keep triumph and all that is therein.
Let all things, seen and unseen, their notes of gladness blend,
for Christ the Lord has risen, our joy that has no end.

OFFERING

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Celebrate “TASTE OF MISSIONS” with fellow Christians worldwide on Saturday, June 15, at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, WI. Join us in person OR online as our new home & world missionaries will be commissioned during a special worship service. Those attending in person can view displays, participate in outdoor activities, & sample ethnic cuisine from some of our mission fields. Enjoy presentations & ask questions about the ups & downs of mission work during a panel discussion.

Registration is \$15 per person [13 years & under can attend for free]. Those who can’t attend in person can still watch all events via livestream. View video updates from missionaries & sample the same cuisines by making the ethnic recipes shared on the website.

Register today & learn more at tasteofmissions.com!

God-Given Workers for His Harvest Field

The number of vacancies for pastor, teacher, and staff minister positions continues to present a real challenge for congregations throughout our synod. At the direction of last summer's synod convention, a special task force has been formed to study the issue of enrollment at our synodical schools and bring recommendations regarding how we can encourage more young people to prepare for the public ministry.

Thankfully, we are approaching the month of May when some relief will be provided for the vacancy situation. The Conference of Presidents will be meeting as the synod's Assignment Committee to assign teacher and staff minister candidates from Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn., and to assign pastoral candidates at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS), Mequon, Wis., to their first calls.

This year at MLC, 145 candidates will be available for assignment. Some of those will be teachers who will be assigned to their first calls; others who were assigned for one year last year will either be permanently assigned to the call in which they are now serving or be re-assigned to new locations. Thirty-seven of the candidates are restricted in where they can serve due to marriage or other circumstances. Many of these will be assigned in May; others will receive assignments in the weeks and months after call day.

At WLS, 27 men will be assigned as pastors. Most of those will serve in parishes; several will be assigned to one-year calls in one of our ministerial education schools as tutors. The Assignment Committee, with the input of the seminary, will also assign 40 men as vicars in congregations throughout our synod. Many of those will be assigned as "Vicars in Mission" to home mission congregations.

Assignment days at MLC and WLS are joyful days—joyful for the young men and women who learn where God will have them serve in the ministry and joyful for the members of the synod who see God keeping his promise to send workers into his harvest field. Keep giving thanks to God for these gifts to his church and keep praying that God will provide even more workers in the years to come.

Serving with you in Christ,
WELS President Mark Schroeder