

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: In the Name of Jesus Christ

Lesson: Acts 3:12-19

¹² When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? ¹³ The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. ¹⁴ You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. ¹⁵ You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. ¹⁶ By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.

¹⁷ "Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. ¹⁸ But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. ¹⁹ Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,

Today is the Third Sunday of Easter.

During the Season of Easter, we joyfully proclaim:

"Christ is risen, Christ is risen indeed."

During his sermon, a pastor asked the congregation, "Is there anyone here who doesn't carry any bitterness in their heart right now? If so, please raise your hand." When no hands were raised, he repeated the question, speaking louder. Finally, an elderly gentleman in the back, well into his 90s, raised his hand. Surprised, the pastor asked again, "Do you truly hold no bitterness towards anyone? "With a weary smile, the old man replied, "I used to, but they've all passed away. There's no one left to harbor resentment against."

This story is very familiar to me, and it's meant to speak about forgiveness and discipleship. However, as I prepared for this sermon, my focus shifted to the words of the old man when this story came to mind.

Today may seem like an ordinary day to us, but for someone, it may be the beginning of a new life, while for others, it may be a day of saying goodbye to beloved family and friends. Indeed, each of us will eventually face a time when we must part with those we hold dear. Whether we are aware of it or not, death is always around us. While death remains close by, adjusting to the loss and sorrow of losing someone is always challenging.

These days, my family has been going through some sorrowful times. My wife's

grandfather passed away two months ago. He was 96 years old and a Korean War veteran. He blessed our marriage more than anyone else and would always give us pocket money from the little he saved whenever we visited Korea.

While my wife was gradually coming to terms with losing him, now her grandmother is in a very critical condition. She's 94 years old, unconscious, and not eating anything. So, my wife and her family are in a state of sorrow.

Death can be an area of unknowns, approaching with fear, sorrow, or pain.

Like us, the disciples of Jesus also thought about death in ways not too dissimilar to ours. Even though they all betrayed and fled from him when Jesus was arrested and dying on the cross, they had spent three years with him.

(Slide 1) Each of them mourned the loss of Jesus in their own way and feared death. However, after Jesus died and rose again three days later, appearing before Mary and his disciples, including Peter, they realized and believed in his resurrection. Through Jesus Christ, they came to believe that life extends beyond this earthly existence into eternal life after death, and their lives were completely transformed by accepting his resurrection.

As a result, the disciples, who once feared death, no longer feared it. Peter, who once denied Jesus, stopped denying him after believing in eternal life. After experiencing Jesus' resurrection, the disciples became witnesses to the resurrection. In particular, Peter and John went to the Jerusalem temple every day to pray.

(Slide 2) One day, they encountered a beggar outside the temple gates. He had been lame from birth and begged for mercy from anyone passing by. That day, he called out to Peter and John as they walked by, asking for help.

The entrance to the temple was a prime spot for begging because people entering typically carried money or offerings to dedicate, often extending mercy to the poor.

If they had not experienced Jesus' resurrection beforehand, Peter and John might have just walked past the beggar, feeling they had nothing to offer.

However, after encountering Jesus' resurrection, they were different. So, they didn't ignore the beggar.

(Slide 3) They asked the beggar to look at them. He might have been expecting some money from them. But Peter took him by the hand and declared, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."

As Peter helped the beggar to his feet, a man who had never walked gained strength in his feet and ankles. He stood, walked, even jumped. The once disinterested beggar now praised God, his life at the temple gate forever changed.

Word spread, and amazed crowds gathered around Peter and John. Peter seized the moment to glorify Jesus, asking, "Why are you so surprised? It's not by our power or godliness that this man walks."

Peter boldly declared that it was Jesus who had healed the man. This event provided Peter with a profound opportunity to proclaim the power of Jesus. The audience consisted of Jews who had been involved in Jesus' crucifixion. Despite having denied Jesus three times as He faced death, Peter now boldly testified to Jesus Christ as if he had found his moment.

What had transformed Peter in the interim? What had emboldened the once-fearful Peter? It was his encounter with the resurrected Jesus Christ.

Peter preached a new faith, one that surpassed the confines of the law: "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord" (Acts 3:19).

To awaken to new perspectives and live a renewed life through Jesus Christ is the essence of resurrection faith. The Bible attests to the power inherent in the name of Jesus. Peter's proclamation, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk" (Acts 3:6), became a paradigm for those seeking Jesus' power thereafter.

While death may evoke feelings of sadness, pain, and fear, it's crucial not to be consumed by them. Why? Because we believe in Jesus Christ and the eternal life He offers.

Both the Eastern Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church uphold a tradition known as the Jesus Prayer. This prayer involves repetitively invoking the name of Jesus.

(Slide 4) The prayer goes like this: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

It's a straightforward prayer that anyone can recite. By continuously repeating the "Jesus Prayer," we direct our focus towards God.

The rationale behind practicing the Jesus Prayer is straightforward. It's because there is power and strength in the name of Jesus. This opens up various applications for prayer.

"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, heal my body."

"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, comfort my soul."

"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, bring peace to my life."

The tradition of the Jesus Prayer has endured for over a millennium because through this meditative practice, people have sensed the presence of the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ and experienced His power.

Even young, healthy people will face getting old, being weak, feeling lonely, and getting anxious. We're all like easily broken containers.

Therefore, we all require God's grace. We all need God's mercy.

"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me."

Call upon the name of Jesus. Love the name of Jesus. Rely on the name of Jesus Christ.

The temple is called a house of prayer for all nations, just as Jesus said, because it's where "My Name shall be there" (1 Kings 8:29). Referring to the Jerusalem temple as the "dwelling place of God's Name" allows people to call upon God while praying there.

When we call upon the Name of God, the One who holds life and sovereignty turns His attention towards us, paving the way for us to approach Him. The Name of God holds promises like "I will certainly be with you" (Exodus 3:12), "I will be there," and this is Emmanuel.

Through faith in the Name of God's Son, Jesus Christ, we receive power. Through faith, we tap into the power of the Name of Jesus Christ. Those who call upon the Name of Jesus will be blessed by God and receive His grace.

Resurrection faith isn't just lip service; it's about the transformation of our lives. If we believe in Jesus Christ, in eternal life, in resurrection, we must live as believers.

I sincerely hope that your faith or our faith in the resurrection will renew your hearts and transform your lives. In the name of the risen Lord, by believing in His Name, your life will be restored and healed.

I pray in the name of the Lord, Jesus Christ, that His Name may claim your life and grant you peace. Amen.