

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

### **Title: Third Sunday of Easter**

### **Lesson: Acts 2:14, 2:36-41**

*<sup>14</sup> Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. <sup>36</sup> "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah." <sup>37</sup> When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" <sup>38</sup> Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call." <sup>40</sup> With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." <sup>41</sup> Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.*

Today is the third Sunday of Easter. Easter is special to us because it has both spiritual and cultural significance. The best part is that Easter isn't just celebrated on one Sunday, but for 7 weeks, remembering and honoring the resurrection of Christ. Christ's resurrection is important to all of us because it brings us good news, victory, and hope. Going forward, we will continue to commemorate Christ's resurrection for the next 5 weeks, including today.

In that spirit, let's exchange Easter greetings: Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!

My family and I arrived at the Minneapolis-St. Paul airport around 11 p.m. on Friday night. When we stepped outside the airport, we were welcomed by snow. One fortunate thing during this vacation was that we successfully caught all our flights without missing any when we traveled to L.A. and back home.

As of July 1st last year, this vacation was my second vacation. Since it's not a vacation that comes often, my wife and I planned and prepared for this vacation early, imagining the warm weather of California and wanting to make the most of this vacation.

As the vacation date approached, my wife told me, "The weather in California doesn't seem great. It's cloudy, dark, rainy, and cold." So I said, "Don't worry. I remember wearing short sleeves T-shirts and shorts when we lived there in April. No matter how cold it gets, California is California. Don't worry." So I packed only short sleeves T-shirts and shorts and brought a jacket just for the airport when we departed.

And on the much-anticipated Easter Sunday, after having the Easter service, we finished packing diligently while Evan took a nap. The next morning, we departed for the airport, bidding farewell to the piled-up snow in front of the parsonage, saying, "Goodbye, snow, see you next year."

We arrived at the airport without any issues, parked smoothly, and checked in successfully. Unlike last time, everything went smoothly. Although Evan didn't take a nap on the plane, the 3-hour flight wasn't too bad. Soon, we heard the announcement for landing, and we looked out at Southern California from the sky. The Pacific Ocean seemed to be welcoming us.

However, when we landed and looked out of the window, the sky was too cloudy and dark. I said to my wife, "It's already 5 PM. Maybe we'll experience the California weather we remember tomorrow." We rented a car and headed to downtown L.A. where Esther's aunt lives, but the scenery outside as we drove felt unfamiliar. The air was humid and the weather was cloudy, unlike the California we remembered. Most of all, the grass and trees along the road were not dry but lush, to the point that we could mistake our current location for Oregon or Seattle.

A few months ago, we heard the news that it had snowed in Southern California and that there had been heavy rainfall like a flood. But it didn't really hit us until we arrived in California. The week before our arrival, the weather had been sunny, but we heard that it had been raining consistently before that.

Nonetheless, I held onto hope that we would encounter sunny weather in California the next day. However, contrary to my expectations, the weather remained cloudy, cold, and windy the next day, and the day after that, and even the day after that. It was nothing like the California I knew and remembered. When I started to think that this wasn't the California I was familiar with, I ended up catching a cold, almost as if fate was playing a cruel joke on me. I didn't catch a cold even during the freezing Wisconsin winter with temperatures as low as -20 degrees, but I caught a cold in California where temperatures were around 50 degrees.

And, to make matters even more ironic, starting from Easter, the weather in Wisconsin during that week was incredibly sunny. During my vacation, whenever I checked Facebook, I could easily find pictures of my Wisconsin friends happily wearing short-sleeved shirts and shorts, looking bright and cheerful. It felt like a comedy. At that time, I had a strong desire to go back home as soon as possible and enjoy the warm weather with all of you.

When planning our vacation, we had many plans. We were planning to watch the sunset at La Jolla cliff in San Diego, a place we often visited, and enjoy sunbathing on the beaches of Santa Barbara and Carpinteria. However, due to the cold weather in California and our poor physical condition, we had to change our plans and decide whether to take it easy and rest during the days given to us at Esther's aunt's place, or stick to our original plans.

In the end, we decided to stick to our plans regardless of the weather. Instead, we decided to buy warm clothes. We didn't want to blame the weather anymore and have an unhappy vacation. Instead, we chose to spend our vacation beautifully and meaningfully.

Do you think God helped us when we made that decision and followed our plans? Did He show us mercy? Even though the weather was cloudy from Monday to Friday in L.A., the clouds cleared and the sun came out as we went to San Diego. The sunlight on the flowers, trees, mountains, and ocean made everything look beautiful and breathtaking.

We safely arrived at our familiar spot in La Jolla. For some reason, the path to the cliff was closed. However, there was an alternate path that led down to the bottom of the cliff, where many tourists were gathered. We went down there with them and were able to enjoy a beautiful sunset.

The path down the cliff was quite long, taking about 10-15 minutes to go down. Evan walked down with us, but he got tired on the way back up and asked me to carry him. I carried him on my back as we climbed the steep hill, and then a person who looked like a park ranger offered to give us all a ride in his truck. We gladly accepted, and he quickly took us up the hill. People who were climbing with us looked jealous. It was a perfect day.

I felt like this vacation was a condensed version of life. Life has its moments, like the beautiful sunsets at La Jolla Cliff, that we want to cherish, but also moments of illness and struggle, like catching a cold, that we'd rather forget. We make plans and sometimes they go smoothly according to our intentions, but other times they take unexpected turns in completely unforeseen directions.

French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre said life is like "C between B and D." C represents the choices we make between B (Birth) and D (Death). Because God has given us free will, we can make choices and decisions about our lives. However, we cannot predict the exact impact of our choices, just like we cannot

predict the weather on April 23rd one year from now, whether it will be cloudy, sunny, or rainy. That's why we always need God, and we should always seek Him for guidance and rely on Him.

I pray and continue to pray that your and my decision to believe in and accept the resurrection of Christ will be sustained until the day we return to the Lord and that our relationship with God will grow deeper and closer day by day. Amen.