

EPISTLE READING: 1 John 3:1-7

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¹See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ²Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he^[a] is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. ³And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure. ⁴Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. ⁵You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. ⁶No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him. ⁷Little children, let no one deceive you. Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.

GOSPEL READING: Luke 24:36b-48

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36 While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 37 They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. 38 He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." 40 And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. 41 While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" 42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate in their presence. 44 Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, 46 and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. *This is the word of the Lord...Thanks Be to God.*

“We Shall Be Like Jesus”

Two caterpillars were crawling across the grass one day when they spotted a butterfly fluttering above them. One nudged the other and said, “You couldn’t get me up in one of those things for a million dollars!”¹ Right.

In the reading the gospel text today, we see Jesus going to great lengths to show his disciples that it is really him who stands before them, not just a ghost or spirit. By inviting the disciples to touch him and then also by eating in their presence, Jesus gives them proof that he has risen from the dead. And they come to realize that Jesus **MUST BE**, Jesus **HAD BEEN** all along truly God! God! Karl Barth is famous for saying, “*God is IN God’s acts*”,² which means that the fulness of God’s own being has been brought to bear in Jesus’ birth, his life, and it was God who died on the cross. God! And it was also God who was now there, alive, revealing himself to the disciples’ very own eyes (*repeat*) as one with feet in both heaven and earth.

You know, there is something very transformative in seeing with one’s own eyes.³ *There are plenty of those stories of people, who have been blind all their lives, suddenly regaining their sight and seeing those they’ve loved all along as they really are.* On that first Easter, the disciples **SAW** Jesus, the One whom they’d loved all along for who he really is. I can only imagine what that was like for them, just as I can only imagine how it will be for me, for you, when at last we come face to face with Jesus, the One we’ve loved, the One who has loved us all along. I can only imagine what it will be like when we will see his gentle smile, the tenderness of his bright eyes, his strong arms and scarred hands reaching out to us, the light of his countenance flooding the space. The lyrics to that song by Mercyme called “I can Only Imagine” say it so well: *Surrounded by Your glory, What will my heart feel? Will I dance for you Jesus, Or in awe of You be still? Will I stand in your presence, Or to my knees will I fall? Will I sing hallelujah, Will I be able to speak at all? I can only imagine, I can only imagine.*⁴

¹ Mark Mollidrem. Sermon: “New Life from Old” <https://sermons.com/sermon/new-life-from-old/1334974>. (accessed 4-13-18).

² Karl Barth. <https://reformissio.wordpress.com/2017/01/20/god-was-in-christ-karl-barth/>. (accessed 4-13-18)

³N.T. Wright. *The Early Christian Letter for Everyone*. (Louisville:WJKP; 2011), 151

⁴ Mercyme “I Can Only Imagine:.” https://www.google.com/search?q=Lyrics+to+%22Only+Imagine%22&rlz=1C1CHZL_enUS708US708&coq=Lyrics+to+%22Only+Imagine%22&aqs=chrome..69i57j0l5.6143j1j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8 (accessed 4/13/18).

Well, this that we can only imagine, is what the apostle John is pointing to in his letters to the early churches, letters which he wrote to not only give clear and practical advice and ways to cope with impending dangers, but to breathe fresh hope and wonder into new-found faith and life. John is pointing the recipients of the letters to the great future hope that is all of ours ... *“When he is revealed,”* John says, *“we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.”* John goes on to say that because of this, believers should make every effort in their present time to prepare themselves, to begin the process of becoming like him. John directs, *“And all who have this hope in him, purify themselves, just as he is pure.”* Scholar, NT Wright offers a good translation, *“If you are going to meet a very important colleague in another country, you might think it worthwhile to learn some of their language in advance. If you are going to meet a future employer, you want to learn enough about the business to make the right impression. And if you are going to meet Jesus himself...well, you want to make yourself like him, pure.”*⁵

Becoming like Jesus, John says, means spending a lot of time looking at Jesus, for he is the pattern and the power, the model and the source of authentic human life, and then we need adopt, imitate his behavior and attitudes. (When people spend a lot of time watching another, they come to resemble them, picking up their manners, habits and viewpoints. *I’ve noticed that both our sons have similar facial expressions when they’re deep in thought as does Mike, and certainly they share many of his likes and dislikes, his views and approaches to things and even his language patterns*).

Yes, we need do as John directs and spend time looking at Jesus and then turn from ways which are not his, that is, from our sins. This turning is the definition of repentance. *My pastor used to illustrate this by planting his feet firmly and physically turning from one direction to the other...turn from the ways of sin to Jesus Christ.* I have not forgotten this because repenting so often does involve a real physical turning from our temptations and then turning toward God.

But repentance means more than just turning. It actually includes walking a new path. It means changing behavior and attitudes. And let’s face it, that can be hard. Doing the real work

⁵ N.T. Wright. *The Early Christian Letter for Everyone*. (Louisville: WJKP; 2011), 151

of turning around, of repentance is not easy. Yet if we are to become pure, if we are to prepare for when we will see HIM face to face, if we are to meanwhile participate as God's children in Christ's redemption of not just ourselves but the WORLD, we need trust that the resurrection of the Christ is proof that it is possible. We shall become like Jesus.

Many churches of our denomination do not talk about repentance all that much. And that is because we believe that this will come naturally, not easily mind you, but naturally as a response when we are flooded with the message of God's acceptance, grace and forgiveness. We can't help but try to change our ways when we say, "*I KNOW he is alive. He is alive in me,*" right? In addition, I agree with Rev. John Vest that Presbyterians in general want to distinguish ourselves from churches with fire-and brimstone- preachers who get red in the face and angry as they give the message of repent, repent, repent. They talk about sin, or at least their understanding of it, in such narrow and harsh ways that leave their followers feeling weighed down by guilt, paranoia and frankly, fear of God. "You're either a saint or sinner. You're either a child of God or a child of the devil. You're with us or against us," they say. The Church can also be seen as hypocritical and fraudulent when the headlines show these preachers to be sinners like the rest of us.⁶

But even so, even affirming these things, I believe strongly that we need speak about repentance. I need preach on repentance because:

1. We, you and I, need to be reminded frequently of our sin and how grievance it is to God. And we need held in front of our goal to be like Christ, and the understanding that while we sin...we will...no doubt...we no longer live under sins' power. As one commentator says, "*Now we play a different song, even if our fingers slip sometimes and play some wrong notes, notes that belong to the music we used to play. The old song has no demand on us, and we can lose interest in it.*"⁷

⁶ John Vest. "Repentance Won't Kill You (But it might hurt a little)." <http://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2009/042609>. (accessed 4/13/18).

⁷ NT. Wright. 151.

2. We also need be reminded that our course corrections are not self-help exercises.

Repentance is only accomplished by the power of Spirit in us. Transformation happens as we, knowing ourselves to be beloved children of God, open our hearts and minds to God's will.

3. Preaching and teaching on repentance can also affirm that becoming like Jesus is not something that is accomplished overnight. It can encourage to journey. There will be days that we do not seem very much like him, but the direction is forward and we will one day become like him. Professor Carroll Simcox says it well, "*We think of ourselves now as human beings. We really aren't, not yet. We are human becomings. If you are living in Christ, believing in him and trying to follow and obey him as the master of your life, you are by his grace, becoming ever more and more like him.*"⁸

4. And finally, we need be reminded of the power of sin in our world and each of our part in it. We are citizens of the world and share in its sins. We are part of the Universal Church and we share in its sins, those of omission and of commission. Yet at the same time, we have access to the power of the Living God in us, the power of the One who is in His Acts, who has shown us such love to be with us and the power to be for us.

So, in closing, I invite you to think on the opportunities for our redeeming work in the world. They are all around us. For instance, next Sunday is Earth day. Beyond deep confession and receipt of forgiveness, what are we really willing to change about the way each of us, and the way we all, live in order that we can participate in the redemption of God's good earth?⁹ What can each of us and what can we together do to address the predilection for violence in our culture? What about the seeming lack of civility and truthfulness in our national conversations? What can be changed? And our worship of the golden calf of wall street, sex, and Hollywood? Ah...there's many opportunities. And for our personal lives? What can we do to address the broken relationships we've nourished within our families, our circles of friends? Or our tendency to give into the demands of work over family, or the value we place on

⁸ Guy Sayles. "*We Will Be like Jesus*" <http://day1.org/988-we-will-be-like-Jesus>. (accessed 4-13-18).

⁹ John Vest.

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personal time in deference to service of others, worship, or study of God's word? What about our arrogance, prejudicial or judgmental tendencies, our worship of our politics?

Friends, our lives are, and this world is, in urgent need, and we can as individuals and as a Church, lead in doing the needed and hard work of repentance. If we do not, if we do not open ourselves up to the Spirit and work to change, we will not be able to spread our wings and fly toward what is our promised Christian hope, being like him and seeing him as he is. We will be like the caterpillars, not able to see what God wants us, beloved children, to become. We shall be like Jesus, friends. Imagine. Can you only imagine? Amen.

Jesus' very first words when he began his ministry, were about this too, "*Repent, for the kingdom, of heaven is at hand.*" (Mt 4:17), and when he is here having his last conversations with his disciples on earth he says that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning at home.