

Sermon – 4-15-2018
Third Sunday of Easter – Act 3
By
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We find Peter and John today exactly where we found them last week: having just healed a man outside the gate called Beautiful. It seems like they didn't stay there, though. The man is clinging to them in thankfulness, people are recognizing that he is the man they know as a beggar, and they come running too, and they all gather in Solomon's Colonnade. Peter is going to take the opportunity to take the spotlight off of himself and put it on Jesus. This, of course, is a change from the Peter we know in the Gospels, who seems to react to everything based on how it makes him feel. But Peter is going to say, "Not us, but God, in Jesus Christ." This is good and right and true. But Peter does this in an unanticipated direction: he goes *off*.

The beginning of his message doesn't sound like something that we expect out of a preacher. Peter seems downright accusatory at the beginning of his sermon. "You handed Jesus over to be killed." "You disowned him before Pilate." "You asked that a murderer be released to you." "You killed the author

of life." "You acted in ignorance." This is harsh language. And we have to ask: how accurate is it? This is taking place after Jesus has ascended into heaven, and after the day of Pentecost. This story is taking place at least two full months after Easter, and of course, Good Friday. Yet Peter sounds like he is talking to the same exact crowd that yelled out "Crucify him!" There's no way that he can be talking to the same people, though, right?

He's probably not talking to the *same* people, but he's talking to the same *people*. He may not be talking to the specific people that were gathered in the Roman court, but he's still talking to people of Jerusalem. And even if the people that were in Solomon's Colonnade weren't from Jerusalem, he was still talking to people who had to live in that Roman world, and if they were at the temple, probably also following the Jewish worship regulations. Peter applies the guilt of the death of Jesus Christ to all these people, who were a part of that culture, and benefited from that culture. When the culture fails someone, the guilt lies on the shoulders of those who are a part of it.

That seems unfair to our ears. The people gathered there didn't have a direct hand in the crucifixion of Jesus, so why should they get blamed for it? But Peter is just putting into place one of God's well-worn

methods: the sin of the individual extends to others touched or influenced by it, even if they weren't even born yet. One of the greatest examples of this is also one of the earliest. The vast majority of humans who have ever lived on this planet have never ever eaten of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Only Adam and Eve have ever done that. And yet, throughout the Scriptures, the guilt of their sin has been applied to us. It has been so applied to us that there is a name for it: original sin. That sin is the sin that we carry with us always, and can't get rid of on our own. We have the guilt of Adam and Eve on our shoulders. Another example: the exile of Israel to Babylon. Not every single person in Israel was using dishonest weights, or neglecting the widow and orphan, or turning their backs on proper worship. But because the culture of dishonesty and ignorance was allowed to fester, all the people carried the guilt, and all the people suffered the consequences.

The theology of the body has to do with this idea as well. When one part of you is sick, all of you is sick. When my stomach pain hit during Holy Week, it wasn't as if the rest of my body didn't have to feel the consequences. Everything had to bear the brunt of one part hurting. And it's the same way with the body of Christ. When one part of the body is hurting, or lost, or misbehaving, or downright sinning, it hurts the

whole body. One of the most prominent examples lately is the rash of abuse and harassment cases that have cropped up amongst very well-known congregations and pastors. I have not done those things. My congregation has not been involved in any cover-ups. Yet, this is the Body of Christ we're talking about. Their sin is my sin. Their guilt is our guilt. This is a tried, tested, and true understanding of the way that sin is present in our lives. Sin is not a rock that we carry; it is a powder that infects anything that come in contact with or are a part of, and we also carry the guilt for it.

So, with this knowledge, it makes sense that Peter would be calling everyone out about the death of Christ, even us. And that's how Peter gets us exactly to the point we need to be at in order to hear what Christ does, has done, and is doing. That work starts with bringing us repentance and change. Yes, we *can* and *should* repent for sins that we have not personally committed. The key is to avoid repenting for *only* the sins you haven't committed. All that becomes is common sanctimony and hypocrisy. But God calls us to repent for the ways that we have participated in and benefited from nations, history, and culture that has gone against God's will, which is to focus on him and take care of our neighbors, widows, orphans, and the alien among us. Verse 26 tells us that this is what Jesus

wants, "to turn each of you from your wicked ways." That includes personal sin and corporate sin, our individual wrongs and the wrongs of the groups we find ourselves a part of. But what does God do when repentance comes to him, when we confess and seek to live more in line with his will?

He brings refreshing from the Lord. That refreshing comes from Jesus Christ himself. He forgives your sins through his death and resurrection. He forgives your personal sins. He forgives your corporate sins. He forgives the sins of the church. He forgives the sins of the nation. He forgives the sins of the culture. And he sets back to work to work in the hearts of his people to turn his own church and the nations and the cultures of the world back to him. Because ultimately, they're all his. He has bought them with his precious blood, and his innocent suffering and death. God wants things to be well in this world, as well as the new heavens and the new earth. And because of Christ, you are a part of both. AMEN.