

Easter 3 – April 14, 2024

Text: 1 John 3:1–7

Theme: Practice Makes Perfect

The disciples who were hiding out in the upper room were entering a whole new world. Once again, the Lord had walked into their lives and upset the apple cart. He does that sort of thing.

Now we have all been through times in our lives when things are hard – when everything we thought we knew turns out to be either wrong or useless information. We’ve all known that feeling when the world seems to drop out from under us, especially when someone we love leaves or dies, or we lose a job or an important relationship ends. The disciples had just watched their beloved friend and rabbi executed by crucifixion and they no doubt wondered if they would be next. Their world had dropped out from under them.

Then, in comes Jesus – but he didn’t bother using the door. There he was, suddenly in the midst of them, with the marks on his hands and his feet from the nails that had been driven into His flesh. He was real. He could even eat. And he asked them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." But before he said any of that, he said more important words, "Peace be with you."

Before Jesus ever asked them to believe anything or proclaim anything – he gave them what they needed in order to be able to do what

he asked. "Peace be with you." It's not a fond wish or a pleasantry, like we say, "have a good day," without even listening to what the person was going through. When Jesus says "peace be with you." He is giving us something – he is imparting His peace and His power.

So then, John comes along in the Epistle for today and says,

"You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous."

At first it sounds like a whole load of guilt is being dumped on us. Now wait a minute Jesus! I have enough to deal with without you coming along and telling me that I'm going to hell if I sin. You know I can't stop sinning. But wait.

We believe that Jesus died on the cross to pay for all our sins, right? It wasn't because of anything we did. It was a pure gift from God because there was nothing we could do, right? Our salvation is all God's doing. So that means that when John says,

"No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him," he's not telling us what to do. He's describing how we are. You and I my friends are without sin. We do abide in him because we are baptized into His name and we receive all the

benefits of his death on the cross for us. He claimed us as his own chosen people and because of who we are, we do not keep on sinning. Because we abide in him, we live in righteousness right now and forever.

Now you might be wondering if I'm delusional. It's okay. Lots of people wonder that. Do I really think that you don't sin? Do I really think that I don't sin? No, I don't live in a fantasy world where everything is puppies and sunshine. I know that we all go off the rails from time to time. We all slip down that dark alley on occasion because our dirty human nature gets distracted by the evil charmer and we let our guard down and before you know it – there we are – lounging around in a stinking, steaming pile of sin. BUT, because we abide in Christ, we are foreigners in that place. We are aliens. We do not belong. We are but a stranger there. Heaven is our home.

That is when our faith in Christ moves us to repent and we are pulled away from sin and back onto the path that follows Jesus. He abides in us and He will not abide in sin so through his Holy Spirit, we are called, gathered, enlightened, and sanctified and soon we are back on the right path – the holy path – the path that leads to paradise. That's why John says,

"Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous."

I've always wanted to play the piano. When I was in college, I had the option of taking piano lessons to fulfil my fine arts requirement. I went to every lesson with great gusto, but I never was any good at playing the piano. See, the part that I had trouble with was what was supposed to happen between the lessons; practice! Practice is where all the real learning takes place. If you don't practice, nothing the teacher has shown you takes hold. I was not good at practicing and hence I still cannot play the piano.

Jesus has paid the price of our sins on the cross. He rose on the third day to prove to us that everything that needed to be done for our salvation had been completed. He empowered us with his Word, with Holy Baptism and with his own body and blood. He has given us peace. Now we practice what we have been given. Will we hit some bad notes from time to time? Yes, we will. Will we even get into some bad habits from time to time? Yes, and we will strive to correct those. And over time, with practice, we will play the song of salvation with joy and with brilliance. We will play the song of salvation that will be perfected on that great and glorious day, the day of the resurrection of all flesh. On that day, all sin will be removed from us and we will be left perfect and holy. On that day we will sing with the angels, and our song will be perfect, holy, and righteous. And maybe, on that day, I will finally be able to play the piano.