

Quasimodo Geniti (2nd Sunday of Easter): April 7th, 2024

“Hey, Guess What?”

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

“I have a great thing to share with you today, but I’m not going to tell you. I am super happy. I am filled with joy, but I’m not going to share with you. Oh, I know you can see the joy in me, and I know you want to know why. Do you really want to hear? Ah, never mind. I’m going to keep it to myself. You might not understand anyway. You might not care. You might have too many questions, and I can’t be bothered with that; because you might not ask me an easy question; then I might have to research it; and I want it to be really easy.”

“I will give you a hint. It’s about what I got for Easter. I’m afraid you might ask a question about it that I cannot easily answer, so let’s agree that I will just tell you and then you cannot ask questions. Jesus died for my sins. He gave His life to set me free from sin, death, and the devil. He does the same for you!”

“All right, that’s enough, let’s just talk about the weather, or about the Reese’s Egg thingies that have the white chocolate. They are my favorite, especially if you put them in the freezer.”

Sadly, this is all too often the response we have to the Gospel. We hear His Word. We receive His gifts. We believe, teach, and confess the joy of the death and resurrection of our Lord. We boldly speak it in here. We sing with joy and acclamation. Then we pocket it, and keep it to ourselves. It stays in the church building, sometimes making home; but we live afraid. We are afraid to be Christian in word and deed on the road, because, “No one else really knows how to drive. Maybe, I should teach a class.” We are timid to live in word and deed at work or at school, because it’s not seen as “the cool thing to do.” We are scared to live as a Christian in word and deed at the stores, because, “What if they ask too many questions, or think that I am weird?”

We are anxious, and sometimes, downright petrified, to share the Gospel with our neighbors. It troubles us to proclaim to them God's Word of Law and Gospel for their forgiveness, life, and salvation. We may know of their sin and their struggle, but we are unwilling to tell them. We want someone else to do it, "Oh, God, please send someone to talk to them!"

Why is this so frightening? Why are so unwilling to admit that we do not know it all? Why are we so hardened that we will talk **ABOUT** our neighbors, but not **TO** our neighbors? Because we have trouble believing it ourselves. We struggle with believing these things, these words of God. Can they actually be true? Maybe there are other gods. Maybe there are other ways. Maybe there is room for doubt. You are just like Thomas. I tell you what, "Unless Jesus can prove it to me Himself. Unless I can actually touch the wounds, I will hedge my bets."

Faith is a gift that is given by God, and it must be nurtured. Without proper nutrition, faith can get weak. It can get sick. It can die. This Sunday is known as Quasimodo Geniti Sunday. It is the 8th Day of Easter, and in the early church, the celebration of the Easter mystery was prolonged for an entire week. During that week, the interest was focused on the newly baptized, those who were baptized on the Easter Vigil. For an entire week, they wore white robes. They were reminded of the joyful experience of their baptism. On the Saturday after Easter, the newly made Christians laid aside their white garments, and replaced them with ordinary clothes. They were given a final admonition that night, from Galatians, "***For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.***"¹

On the following day, the 8th Day of Easter, they prayed the words of our Introit, "***Like newborn infants long for the pure spiritual milk of the Word.***" It was on this day the newly baptized would take their place in the midst of the congregation, and had to assume personal responsibility for their spiritual welfare. They pledged their highest fidelity, the greatest loyalty and perseverance, in the new way of life. These infants, newly born in the faith, are raised, taught, and fed.

¹ Galatians 3:27

Of all the trials facing them in their new life of faith, one of the first lessons they encounter is unbelief. The lessons for this day center not on doubt, but on unbelief. Thomas' problem was not doubt; it was unbelief. Thomas just could not believe other's words about Jesus.

There are two distinct actions and reactions of the men in our Gospel reading. The Disciples were afraid they would be arrested and killed for supporting the conspiracy of Jesus against Rome. Some had seen Jesus earlier that morning. This was still Easter. Even though the doors were locked, Jesus appears. He stands in their midst and He speaks, "Peace to you." When Jesus speaks, creation listens, so they are at peace. They have peace. Jesus then says, "As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you. Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive, release, anyone their sins, they are forgiven, released. If you bind their sins. If they are not forgiven. Their sins are bound to them. Ready. Go." So what do they do? They rush out to find the only other disciple not in the room, Thomas.

Thomas hears these 10 eyewitness accounts. He knows these guys. He has lived closely with these guys for the past three years. They have gone through some things together. They have laughed, wept, questioned and learned together with the Son of God. He hears their matching testimonies. Old Testament Law only required a minimum of two witness bearing the same account to be legally formidable, and here there are 10 matching reports. How does he hear them? He does not believe them! Thomas did not struggle with doubt. The text literally says that he did not believe. Jesus will tell Him, "Thomas. Do not be in unbelief! Believe!"

You and I are a strange bunch of people. We hear the same witness accounts. We are filled with these gifts, and what do we do? We go back and forth. At times, we rush out to find our family and friends, and tell them what we heard, saw, and received from the Lord of Life: forgiveness, peace, love and strength. We may not be quite ready to rush out and tell someone we are not close to, but at least our family and friends hear it.

Sometimes, we are like Thomas. We hear the words, and we do not believe. The world says something different, or my friends say something different and, “I like their version better. God is too outdated, and I think people can do whatever they want. It’s fine. God will love them. He loves me.” Sometimes we hear God’s Law and we think, “Wow, God has a problem. My friends make more sense than that. God’s way seems unloving, and strict, and unfair, and I don’t like it.”

Sometimes we hear the truth of God’s redeeming love and we think, “No way. There is no way I need someone to do that for me. I am strong enough.” Then we spend our days in fret, and our nights in anxious worry. We may even speak with our mouths, “Oh yes God. I believe. You da’ Man!” All the while, we think in our hearts, “Oh yeah, God. I believe you are the man – of failed dreams and empty promises.”

We struggle with believing that Jesus would die for me. We have a hard time with seeing Jesus paying for my sin. Jesus giving me peace. Jesus actually being here, right now, for me. We are lying in the Valley of Dry Bones, with death all around and my life, feeling as though, it is sapped from my bones.

But Jesus never changes. We go back and forth. We are confusing, and sometimes a downright “hot mess.” God through a man spoke to the Valley of Dry bones and they lived. God became man and spoke to dead faith and dry bones, and the disciples received peace. Thomas believed and was given forgiveness.

Blessed are those who have seen and believed, and much more blessed are those who have not seen and believe. God, through the mouths of sinful men proclaims and gives forgiveness. Publicly, this is done through the mouths of sinful pastors. Privately, this is done through sinful men and women. Sinful yes, but purchased and redeemed Children, speaking not their own words, but God’s. He uses humans to speak in word and deed, by life and conversation, the love that He has for us in Christ Jesus.

We confess that the Bible is the inspired and inerrant Word of God; that is to say the Holy Spirit is the author of Holy Scripture. It is God's Word and true in all it says. It is true for all people, at all times, and in all places. It is true, whether or you believe it. God doesn't need your approval. He determines what is holy, right, and good. So that we know, He gives us His word. It is the only thing that can give life to the dead bones in the valley of the shadow of death.

He gives men the words to say, and they simply are to say them. You are not called to change hearts and minds. You are called to speak God's Law and Gospel. You are called to be faithful to His Word, and the Holy Spirit will do His work. You are called to forgive, as your heavenly Father forgives. You are called to bear witness to the light, and the very gifts of God Himself. You are called to proclaim the Gospel in word and deed with whom you come into contact.

In God's great wisdom, hear again our Epistle reading with a few verses before and after, ***“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? This is he who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree. If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”***²

² 1 John 5:1–12

Our last words of the Gospel reading proclaim, “*Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*”³ His Word does not tell us everything we want to know. It doesn’t answer every question we have. It doesn’t even tell us everything that Jesus did, let alone the entire history of God from the beginning to now. I know that it is a relatively short history, only 10,000 years, or so; however, not everything was recorded for us. We have less witnesses testifying to Homer writing the Iliad, and we take that as scientific fact. We have more witnesses to the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the authorship of each book and letter of the Bible, so why do we have such a hard time? We what answers, and it does give us answers. Maybe, *just maybe*, we are not so good at asking questions. Maybe, *just maybe*, we don’t like the answers we hear!

God’s Word doesn’t give us what we want, it gives us what we need. It gives us everything that we need for salvation. We have the words we need, the witnesses we need, so that we may believe Jesus is the Christ. He is the Anointed One. He is the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. He is my Lord and my God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.

In a beautiful gift of God, His Word is joined to water, and you are given the family name of Christ Jesus. You are born into the family of believers. You receive His Holy Spirit. You are born into a family, a living organism. One that confesses sins to one another, and prays for one another, in order that you may be healed.⁴ The very words of life are read, spoken, and proclaimed from lectern and pulpit, bestowing life and strengthening faith. These words are joined to bread and wine. His body and blood are given to you. Feeding your life, granting forgiveness, and giving salvation. His work on Calvary’s cross is given to you. His triumphant Easter rising, is yours. God gives forgiveness and works life in your dead bones, as through His Word, by His Spirit, He draws you together and gives you life.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.

³ John 20:30–31

⁴ James 5:16

Prayer of the Church
Second Sunday of Easter (Quasimodo Geniti)
7 April 2024

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Heavenly Father, in Holy Baptism the children of Your Church are born again to a living hope. Feed and nourish our faith, bring us through every trial, and lend strength and joy to our praises of the risen Christ. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious Lord, give courage to all pastors as they preach and teach the Word, that all who hear may believe and that, believing, they may live in righteousness and godliness until the day Christ returns as Judge and Lord of all. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Merciful Father, remember those who have wandered from the household of faith. Faithful to Your promises, work all things in their lives to remind them of their need for Your unending grace and steadfast love, that they might return to the faith and delight in Your Son, crucified and raised for them. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, You appoint rulers and officials for the sake of order and peace. Bless those You have placed in authority in federal, state and local governments. Give to them the desire to serve with integrity and honor and to work for the benefit of all. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Father, we give thanks that in Holy Baptism we receive forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation, bless those who celebrate baptismal anniversaries this week, especially, *Ben, Chezlie, Ken, Gabe, and Gavin*, grant that by Your Word and Spirit they may faithfully keep the covenant into which they have been called, boldly confess their Savior, and finally share with all Your saints the joys of eternal life; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Blessed Lord, as Your Son's wounds brought gladness and peace to the troubled disciples, give Your presence and comfort to the troubled in our midst *especially for Esther, Ruth, William, Zoey, Betty, Jeri, Denise, Pastor Small, Debbie, and those we name in our hearts*. Comfort those who weep with the blessed joy of Easter morning. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Father in heaven, You gave the testimony of Your Spirit in the water and blood that poured from Christ's wounded side. Grant that, having received this testimony in the water of Baptism, we may also receive it in the body and blood of Jesus in the Holy Supper and so overcome the world by our faith in Him. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord, give us all things good and beneficial to us and to our salvation, and keep us from all things harmful; through Jesus Christ, our crucified and risen Savior, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**