

April 11, 2021

The Second Sunday of Easter

Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Milan, WI

St. John Ev. Lutheran Church, Edgar, WI

Text: 1 John 1:1-2:2

In the Name of the Father and the ✠ Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

He is Risen!

Way back in the 1990's we lived in Fairbanks, Alaska where I attended college. I was also in the Army National Guard. Those two vocations – geology student and soldier – enabled me to travel all over that gigantic state for one reason or another, something even life-long Alaskans don't get to do. The lack of roads that makes travel difficult. Through the course of my Army adventures, I traveled twice to the northern-most city in North America, Barrow. And through sheer coincidence, one time was over the summer solstice and the other time was over the winter solstice. Now, living in Fairbanks as we did, you'd think I would be used to messed up day-night cycles, and we were up to a point. In Fairbanks in the summer the sun does go down, for a few hours, but it never gets very dark. And in the winter the sun does come up, for a few hours as well. So you never really have total darkness or total daylight. But in Barrow you do. And I can tell you, it is strange. I was sent up there in December of 1999 to set up long-range radio equipment in preparation for Y2K, just in case all of the computers and satellites failed and all of the phones in the state stopped working. Setting up those radio antennas in the dark and bitter cold and blowing snow was oppressive. It was unnatural, being in darkness all the time like that. I was there for only three or four days, but even thinking about it now twenty-plus years later gives me the shivers. The other time I was in Barrow was in June and the sun never set and we were truly in the light all the time. Everyone was happy and energetic. They housed us at an Air Force site outside of town and the entire structure was built on stilts. On the door as you exited was a warning: "Check for polar bears before closing the door". But being there at that time of year, with the sunlight illuminating everything and our spirits high, made even the threat of being eaten by a polar bear seem tolerable.

This is what I think about when I read 1 John: The light and the darkness. St. John doesn't say that God has light in Him or that God owns light, as if it were a thing in His pocket along with His keys and some Tic-tac's. John says that "**God is light**" (v.5). And what is the nature of light? To illuminate, to spread, to drive away the shadows. And, most important of all, to give life. Light is all that is good and desirable. And what about darkness? Darkness is everything that is not of God, the opposite of His holy nature: It is sin, it is falsehood, it is wickedness. It is everything that has fallen away from the brilliance of God. The light shines on the things of darkness so that they can be seen clearly. Scientifically speaking, there is no such thing as darkness: Darkness is simply the absence of light. Theologically speaking, wickedness is the absence of godliness. Without faith, without that fear, love and trust in God, we quickly slip into the shadows, where our rebellious nature is revealed. We find a home in the nooks and crannies where God's light, His truth and love, cannot reach us. Because we don't want our sins exposed. We like our lies.

The Apostle wrote, **“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”** (v.8) Deceive ourselves? Lie to ourselves? How is that possible? How can the mind trick itself? It is far easier that we like to admit. We lie to ourselves all the time about little things and big things. We say that we will only eat one more cookie, but then before you know it, the entire box is gone. We knew the temptation was great and our willpower was weak, but still we allowed ourselves to be deceived by... ourselves. By our inborn, sinful nature. And if we can be so easily tricked with something as trivial as cookies, how much worse is it with the big things? We tell ourselves that the flirtations at work aren't really sinful, we're just joking around. But that's a lie. We hope the flirting will turn into something more, that the adultery in our mind will blossom into the real thing. The little lie at first leads to bigger lies later on.

We tell ourselves that society approves of our wicked behavior, so God should too. The church has it's opinion and I have mine. Who's to say I'm wrong? This is the complex story we tell ourselves, a story composed in the shadows, where the light cannot reach us. Where the light cannot expose the truth. The sexual sins that the world pushes – promiscuity, cohabitation, homosexuality – none of these are new. But the story we swallow is that they are progressive, that they are fresh and liberating. We don't just allow these sins to happen to us. We embrace the lie and make it our own. But saying a sin is not a sin is in fact the oldest of sins. Adam and Eve embraced the lie of Satan when he said, “Did God really say...?” This is what we do best. We deceive ourselves.

We do it all the time. We say that we are not to blame for the ongoing fighting in our family. It is her fault, not mine. She's the one who started it! But we know that we are just as guilty of making those snide comments, of giving those dirty looks and making those hateful comments. We are disrespectful day after day and then we claim that it was that thing that happened two years ago, not what is taking place right now. We continue to feed the flames and say that it isn't our fault! But we are lying, both to ourselves and to God. And that is the worst part.

We may have slippery memories and might even be able to convince ourselves that a lie is the truth, but do we really expect God to fall for that, to fall for our lies? The answer is: Usually. We like to think of God as a harmless old uncle in a rocking chair, hard of hearing and poor of eyesight. We think He only knows what we want Him to know, that we can paint a rosy picture for Him and He will pat us on the head and give us a hard candy for coming to visit. But that is just another lie that we tell ourselves, the lie that God doesn't know our true hearts. Our reading continues in verse ten; **“If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”** (v.10) We make God out to be a liar. God says that everyone sins, that every person alive is born in sin and has nothing but rebellion in their hearts. God says that we do not seek after Him and instead follow the ways of the devil, the world and our wicked flesh, but we ignore that too. When we look at ourselves and say, “I'm a good person, I have nothing to be ashamed of”, you are calling God a liar. You are saying that He doesn't know what He is talking about and you know better than He.

Repent. Repent of your sins and confess them all before God. As John wrote, **“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”** (v.9) We say this as part of the liturgy, but often we say it too quickly, with too little self-reflection. God already knows your sins. That you are a sinner is no surprise to Him at all, nor is it a surprise to you pastor. I encourage to take advantage of Individual Confession, to be honest with yourself and honest with God, and hear the Absolution of your sins. Each and every pastor is called to serve a congregation of sinners. It’s in the job description. His job is to apply the Means of Grace, the Word and Sacraments, to those sinners, assuring them that they are also saints. They are holy ones, made holy by the blood of the Lamb.

St. John wrote, **“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”** (2:1) That is what gives us boldness to confess our sins: Knowing that Jesus is our advocate, Jesus is our High Priest. The Lamb of God has paid for each of our sins so we should not fear the wrath of God any longer. We know that Christ Jesus went to the cross for us, was raised for us, and intervenes for us even today. Our sins are paid for. So why do we keep hiding the bills?

I cannot say it better than the Holy Spirit can, so I leave you with His words given to the disciple whom Jesus loved: **“This is the message we have heard from Him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.”** (v.5-7)

He is risen! He is risen, indeed. Alleulia!

In Jesus’ blessed name, Amen.

Rev. Schopp