

6th Sunday of Easter

“Your precious saving baptism through the resurrection of Jesus” 1 Peter 3:21-22

May 14, 2023

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this 6th Sunday of Easter is from our epistle reading, 1 Peter 3:21-22

“21 There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.”

This Thursday, the 18th of May, is a special day in the church year. It marks the 40th day after Jesus’ resurrection. What happened on the 40th day? Jesus gave His final commands to His church of living stones and then ascended into heaven. The church, God’s people, built on the chief cornerstone, THE precious living stone, Jesus, are sent to an unbelieving and fearful world.

Ascension Day is Jesus’ going into heaven and sitting at the right and of God with authority and power over all, and the church going out into the world under Jesus’ authority and power with the eternal answers that all people need.

Our epistle reading begins with these words:

“And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? 14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you are blessed. “And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.” 15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;”

Christians, you and me, are to be fearless in a fearful and fear causing world. Remember who you are. You are not reeds bent in the wind. You are living stones, built on the chief Cornerstone, Jesus. You are living because Jesus is alive. And He has entrusted you with a most important message to give to the world – Jesus Crucified and Risen for the salvation of all!

The unbelieving world needs this message. They are without hope. But you have the sure hope, Jesus. Peter says that you should be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you.

You need to be ready to tell others why you have hope in this fear filled world. Why are you in the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:8 **“hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—”**

Why? Paul gives the answer. **“always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.”**

We are subject to the same sufferings as Jesus in our body and yet we rejoice when we suffer unjustly as our Lord told us in Matthew 5:

“11 Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

And Peter repeats these words to us in our epistle reading, doesn't he? **“14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed.”**

Fearlessly giving an answer of the hope you have in Jesus to a fearful world! And what is that answer? Peter clearly tells us in our epistle.

“18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit,”

Verse 18 is your answer. Memorize it and be ready to tell it to a lost soul. Jesus suffered once, only once. He did this once and for all on the cross.

What did He suffer? Sins.

Whose sins? The sins of the unjust.

Who are the unjust? All people.

Why did He do this? To bring us to God. For we were all lost and condemned because of our sins and apart from God eternally.

How did He do this? He died and put to death in His flesh all our sins.

How do we know this is true? He was made alive by the Spirit. Jesus rose again! The Father accepted His sacrifice for the sins of the world. This my hope. Repent of you sins and receive Jesus' forgiveness for your soul.

How necessary is it for you to repent? Do you know the story of Noah and the flood? God in His patience gave all the people of Noah's day 120 years to repent and turn from their sins while he and his family were building an ark.

How many did so? Only 8. Noah, his wife, his sons and their wives. What happened to the rest of the world? They all died in the flood. Well, that seems harsh. Yes, God's punishment for sin is harsh. He doesn't want to punish you so He punished His Son Jesus on the cross. But, only when a person repents and believes in Jesus, God does not hold our sins over us but forgives them.

Only 8 repented and God destroyed the rest of the world through a flood that covered every living creature. There was no escape. God is serious about sin. And Peter reminds us that all those unrepentant people at Noah's time and any other unrepentant person who had died in unbelief are in the torments of hell.

How do we know this? Peter tells us in our epistle reading these words.

“18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, 19 by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, 20 who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.”

This is what we just confessed in the Apostles Creed. “Crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell.”

Not to suffer again. No, only suffered once for sins. Not to preach repentance and offer a second chance to those in the prison of hell. No, listen to Peter in his second epistle in chapter 2:

“God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; 5 and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly;”

No, Jesus didn't descend to hell after He rose from the dead to save people. He went to judge them and show His victory over them!

Oh, what a serious task God has placed in your hands, believer in Jesus, to be ready to give a defense of your hope in Him so that an unbeliever does not go to hell!

This is the great commission that Jesus gave to His church before He ascended. We know it well from Matthew 28.

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.

What is the answer for fearful people wanting to know what your hope is?
Baptism!

What does baptism do? Let's let our text tell us one more time.

“21 There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,”

Short answer...baptism saves you!

As Noah and his family were lifted by the waters and brought to dry ground after the flood, so baptism lifts your soul from your sin that is destined to hell, and brings you to the promised land of heaven!

Baptism makes you a disciple of Jesus by cleansing you from your sin. Listen to the words of Peter's Pentecost Day sermon:

“Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

And because God forgives you your sins in baptism, your soul is saved and you are given a good conscience. This is God's answer to sin. He removes the filth of the soul and gives you a clean conscience, without fear before God.

How can this be? It is only possible through the resurrection of Jesus. For at Jesus resurrection, God pronounces the world justified! And through baptism one receives this justification personally! Oh how precious is your baptism!

Again, Paul tells us in Romans 6 that through baptism we are united in His death and resurrection!

“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

Walking in newness of life – right now and eternally. That’s your hope for a fear filled and fear causing world. That’s the hope that our God fearing mothers and fathers have given to us as they brought us up in the faith and brought us to the baptismal font! We give thanks especially this day to God for our faith filled mothers who taught us and guided us in His Word.

Be fearless then, in proclaiming this Gospel message and through it, the Holy Spirit will bring lost souls into the ark of His living church and save them from eternal condemnation. Baptism saves! Amen.

“The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)