

Mount Olive Lutheran Church  
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The Second Sunday of Easter  
April 19, 2009  
1 John 1:1-2:2

*“Touched by the Word of Life”*  
by Pastor Mark E. Wangerin

Introduction

When you read your Bible or listen to sections read from it have you ever noticed how certain passages stand out? Perhaps they are passages you memorized as a child or a student or just have become familiar with by reading or hearing them. There are also certain passages which are frequently used in worship or as proof passages for important Biblical doctrines. This Easter season, the Epistles will all be from the First Epistle of St. John. As I looked at the reading for this Sunday, it was striking that three passages jumped out as just those kind of important passages. They are easily remembered, frequently used, and speak most clearly about the very center of the Christian faith. And in the context of the opening words of this letter of the Apostle as well the familiar Gospel account for this Sunday after Easter of Thomas and his encounter with the risen Lord Jesus, we will consider the theme: Touched by the Word of Life. May the Holy Spirit, who inspired these precious words, bless our hearing and speaking today as well.

I. The Big Three

Many people believe that the most concise description of the Christian faith is John 3:16—“For God so loved the world ...” That may very well be true. But if you were to ask me which passage I use most often to describe the Christian faith, it would be the first of what I would call the big three in our epistle: “The blood of Jesus [Christ] his Son, cleanses us from all sin.” I have used that passage on many occasions to speak to people about what is the central saving message of the Christian faith. It speaks of sin and grace, of sacrifice and forgiveness in just a few short words. And it is clear about the work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Several years ago one of our now sainted older members spoke to me with the trepidation that often comes to people. She asked, “When I die what will I say to God when I stand before him?” I remember telling her most simply, say, “The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.” And this look of peace and quiet acceptance came upon her. For it really says all that needs to be said.

Yet as Scripture continues to teach there is more to be said, and the next verses of this Epistle are words that we use quite often in our worship. They are the opening dialog of confession from what was once called Divine Service 2 but is now Divine Service 1 in the Lutheran Service Book. “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Words that are spoken as words of confession but with the assurance of absolution as well. There are tragically many people who feel they have no need to confess sins. There are also many who do not even understand the reality of sin and its

consequences. So much of modern day thinking is to make everything alright or a matter of choice, to deny that there is such a thing as wrong except in some very specific areas which are often matters of personal opinion or feeling. There is no objective standard anymore. The Ten Commandments are out. The will of God clearly revealed plays no part in understanding sin. If we say we have no sin we do deceive ourselves. But with confession of sin also comes the assurance of forgiveness. Notice that the word cleanse is there again. God will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. For the blood of Jesus his son cleanses us from all sin.

The third notable passage follows a few verses later as the Apostle John continues to discuss the necessity of our understanding the reality of sin. He says that if we have not sinned we make him a liar and his word is not in us. He also though exhorts his children, the children of God, not to sin. But then he goes on to say, "If anyone does sin (which is self-evident and obviously true as we have just said)—if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." We have a defense attorney if you will, one who speaks on our behalf. And Jesus Christ can speak for us because he is the propitiation. Now that is a big word. It might be better to translate it as sin offering. Jesus is the sin offering for not just our sins but for the sins of the whole world. And once again we are back to the first of our passages, for it is by the blood of Jesus Christ his Son that our sins are cleansed. And in a sense we are back to John 3:16—For God did so love the world, that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. Eternal life is ours in him. These words are truly words of life and we have been touched by them.

## II. Touched by the Word of Life

But there is a more physical literal way in which we have been touched with the word of life. There is most definitely an Easter connection in that thought. We can see it in the opening words of this Epistle—St. John is writing personal experience here: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us..." Here is the word of life made manifest, incarnate, taking upon flesh for us. There is most certainly an echo in these opening words of this first epistle of St. John of the opening sentences of the Gospel. In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God ... the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory ..." Notice the assurance of the apostle in those words and in these as well "we have heard, we have seen, we have looked upon, we have touched." With ears, with eyes, with hands, we know and believe.

And here is the marvelous and striking connection with the account of the Gospel for today as well. It is most assuredly an Easter Gospel. It is an Easter story. The disciples behind locked doors for fear, are greeted by the Lord Jesus himself. He offers them peace. He shows them his hands and his side. He breathes on them and they felt his presence. And one week

later, doubting Thomas is literally dragged into belief. The Lord appears again. "Come here Thomas, put your finger here. Take your hand and put it in my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas touched and confessed, "My Lord and my God." And for all the disciples there they had touched the risen Lord. They knew in him eternal life for he is life eternal, victory over sin and death. The Lord Jesus, risen from the dead, showed himself alive forevermore.

### III. We Have Touched Him Too

And we too have been touched by the word of life. In the witness of the Resurrection by those privileged to be with the Lord, in the unfailing unerring truth of his word as well we have seen and know it. And though separated by time, we too know him. As the Lord told his disciples: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." And yet we too are touched by him in the waters of Holy Baptism, in the bread and the wine, his most precious body and blood of the Lord's Supper. In the fellowship of the Holy Christian Church we are touched by the word of life and we are blessed as his beloved children. In Him is eternal life and victory

When doubts assail us, when pain and the fear of death might seek to overwhelm us. When our sins seem too much to bear, hear the Lord say to us: Look at my hands and my side. Stop doubting and believe. For he is the propitiation. The sin offering. And God is faithful and just and will forgive us all our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

We have come full circle. We are back to the beginning: For the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sins.

In His Name. Amen.