

Easter Means...We Are Pure!

A sermon based on 1 John 1:5-2:2.

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

How observant are you? Have you noticed the outside of the church is a different color than it used to be? Oh, it's still brown, but I'm guessing it's not as dark as it used to be. The color is fading as it's been bleached in the sun over the years. I'm sure you've seen those effects before. Some cushions lawn chairs you've left on the porch are no longer the vibrant colors they once were when you bought the set how many years ago...again, bleached by the sun. For some people, their hair turns a shade lighter after a trip to Hawaii as it too is bleached by the sun.

But did you know that radiation from the sun not only removes color, but it can also remove bacteria? I did some reading this week and learned that you can purify water, killing any bacteria in it and making it safe for human consumption using a clear 2-liter bottle, the sun, and a little bit of time. Just lay the bottle down on its side for maximum exposure to the sun and in 6 hours of direct sunlight or 2 days of indirect sunlight, all your E-coli, salmonella, and giardia will be gone. Your water will be pure enough to drink!

In our sermon for this morning, we hear how the Son (s-o-n) purifies us. He who is in his very nature light makes us pure, not of bacteria, but of sin! He makes us morally pure and holy! In a sense, you could say we have been bleached by the Son! As we focus on where we left off in 1 John last week, we see how Easter, for us, means that we are pure.

Now, I've noticed a change in many of you over the last month or so. I'd like to think it's the Easter glow (and I'm sure that's having its effect), but it's something else, too, isn't it. The Vernal Equinox arrives, and there's a noticeable shift in people's attitudes. And that's because...the sun is back! It doesn't take a person spending a year or two in Alaska's interior to understand how vital the sun is. The sun is essential to life. And, not just to boost our attitudes.

Without the sun (or too far away from the sun), we would die. With temperatures that would dip well below our frigid 40-50 belows, no amount of insulation would be able to keep us from freezing. There would be no crops; nothing else would be able to live. The sun gives life.

Ironically, get too close to the sun, and we would die. Instead of freezing to death, we would burn up. Have you ever felt the pain of a bad sunburn? Nothing would compare to what would happen if we got too close to the sun. We would be totally consumed.

Well, here, John compares God to light. He says God is light. And, like the sun, we can't live without him. He's the source of all good things including the sun. He's the one, who shining with love, has created perfect balance in our solar system, keeping us the right distance from the sun, maintaining and preserving our lives.

But, like the sun as well, we can't get too close to him, not the way we are, or we will be consumed by his holiness. That was the fear of the Old Testament Israelites, and rightly so. God himself told them, **"No one may see me and live."** In our Daily Bible Readings for this past week from Deuteronomy, the people reiterated the same notion with their fears, **"This great fire will consume us, and we will die if**

we hear the voice of the LORD our God any longer.” They knew, and God affirmed...they were not worthy to stand in the presence of a holy God. They could not stand up to God’s standard of perfection and expect to live.

Is it any different with us? Following on last week’s sermon, which was based on the verses before the ones for today, John writes about how we live in our renewed and restored relationship/fellowship with Jesus. We walk in the light.

And God is light. God is perfection. So, walking in the light is walking in the way of perfection or walking in the path of God’s commands and avoiding the darkness of sin.

Can we do that? Do we do that? Sometimes, yes. Perfectly, no. By ourselves, never.

Friends, this is who we are by nature. Born in sin, we are children of the darkness. We live entitled lives, where we think about ourselves first, where we put our wants and needs first. We have sinful and angry and lustful and impure thoughts about others, which sometimes leads to hateful or hurtful or reputation-damaging or impure words or actions. How often does the world revolve around you more than around the sun? How often does the world revolve around you more than around the true light, the Son, Jesus?

I’m not even sure I need to get more specific than that. You know your sins. You know your weaknesses. You know your failure, no matter how great or how little. We walk in darkness. And you know what the darkness leads to...you freeze to death.

Is that too harsh? I mean, I’m not that bad. I’m here today, which means there must be some kind of good left in me. I’m certainly not perfect, but I’m certainly not pure evil either. I’d like to think I’m a good person more often than not.

Do you see the danger in that thinking? John writes, ***“If we claim to have fellowship with [God], yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth...If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”***

You know, you could sit here amongst each other, you could walk around your entire life with this aura of piety and virtue, you could downplay the seriousness or even the extent of our sins. You could think you have nothing confess and lay at the throne of God, and you might fool others. You would be definitely fooling yourself. You don’t fool God.

And I’m there, too. John here as well. He says, “We.” All of us. Even an apostle was susceptible to this kind of thinking.

But God knows the real you. He knows how you, on your own, impure, darkened by sin, cannot and do not deserve to stand in his holiness. We do deserve to come near to God, only to receive his judgment...a terrible Son-burn...and cast out of his light and his loving presence forever. That’s the truth.

We need help. That’s the truth. We will always need God. As with the sun, we have complete dependence on God every second of every day. We will always need Jesus. And, so God’s solution? He gave us what we needed. He gave us the Son to purify us from sin.

Imagine you were stranded on an island with nothing but dirty water. You would die either of thirst or from the sickness you would likely contract from drinking bacteria-infested water. But, let's say you also had one of those liter bottles we talked about earlier, and you went through that purification process, using the sun to bleach or kill off all the harmful bacteria. The pollutants would be gone, you'd be safe to drink the water. You could live until you were rescued.

We are living in a world where the only choice we can make is to drink in temptations and infect and harm our bodies more and more with sin. Until God intervened and purified us. John tells us how, ***"The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."*** It's weird to think about how blood, something that typically stains, would be what God used to bleach our sins away. But, as God's Word says, that "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness," it was indeed Jesus' blood that bleached us clean and purified us?

How? The blood of Jesus was clean blood...precious, perfect blood because Jesus is light. He lived a life here without sin. But he willingly shed his perfect, precious, innocent blood on the cross as the ***"atonement sacrifice for our sins...for the sins of the whole world."*** That blood washed us clean...purified us forever. And Easter is the proof! The Light is. Jesus lives. And you and I will not die but live.

And you and I live in the light of Jesus's forgiveness. And you and I live in the light and walk in the light.

Or, we should. I mean, how do I know I'm a Christian since I still sin (all the time still!)? And, I know you're there with me, so here's the solution: Cling to God's promises. John writes about the ***"message we have heard..."*** but in the Greek, that word 'message' is literally 'promise.' And what is the "promise" we have heard and declare? Jesus is the Righteous One who lived perfectly for you. His blood purifies us from sin. His death paid for it...sent it away...for you...for me...for the whole world.

And he will (not might or we can hope)...he will forgive and purify us...when we confess our sins. That's his promise. And, if that's his promise, we now see how important confession and repentance is in the life of those who have been purified and walk in the life...us. Simply put...when you mess up, fess up. Is that easy for you? It should be. The gospel drives out the fear of confession.

It's not always easy, though. It's scary to confess to someone because you know there could be consequences. It's humiliating because you don't want to appear weak or because you're embarrassed about what you've done.

Children of God, it's not humiliating to confess your sins to God because he already knows you...knows your weakness...knows your faults...knows your sin. It's not scary to confess to God because you know what he will say (even if there will be some consequences). It's always, "I forgive you."

And so, if that's his message for us, what will we do? We will confess to God, literally "agree with" him that we are sinners in need of his help. And, following Martin Luther's advice, we can make that a daily/continuous practice...whenever we sin. We will trust in God's promise/message of forgiveness. And we'll walk in the light, living for him in thanks for our purification. And then, don't go muddy the water again. Try to keep it pure.

You will mess up. We're saints in God's eyes, but we're still sinners throughout this life. But your defense attorney will come to your side again, assuring you that when you confess, you are forgiven...purified...bleached!

Friends, the Light has made you clean! The Son has bleached away your sins...now and forever. So, walk in the light! Stay clean...in your thoughts, your words, your actions! Live in the light! Live as you know God would have you live. Delight in the light! And in the forgiveness God brings, purifying you in the Son, proven by his resurrection, and serve God in thanks for what he's done as you confess and rejoice and live...confess and rejoice and live. Amen.