

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Easter 3

April 26, 2020

Sermon by Pastor Dan Pautz

Theme: You are a miracle

—Acts 2:14a, 36-47

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.” With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

It was a day of miracles, many miracles. And it was all based on the glorious Easter miracle of the resurrection of the Lord. Our dead Savior raised Himself to life. Fifty days later as thousands of Jews gathered in Jerusalem for the Harvest Festival was Pentecost. There was some miraculous audio-video; the sound of a violent wind but no wind and the visual of tongues of fire that rested upon each of them. Then came another miracle – the ability of the people who had gathered to speak in different languages, languages which they had never spoken before. Then there was the miracle of the Apostle Peter who but less than two months before cowered in fear denying that he even knew the Lord Jesus. But on this day Peter boldly in front of thousands preached that they were guilty of crucifying Jesus who is the Lord and the Christ, the Messiah. But the miracles were not over yet for there were 3000 people who repented, came to faith, and were baptized. And that truly is a miracle. The miracle consists not simply in the staggering number of 3000 people who were baptized and came to faith but in each individual who came to faith, 3000 individual miracles.

It is no different for you. You are a miracle. Some might say that, of course, you are a miracle. Just think of the body that God has given you. A Christian professor told her medical students, “Of all the people in the world doctors and nurses ought to be the most religious for they are working with a miracle of God, the human body. It has its own internal transportation system – the blood vessels which carry nutrients throughout the body. If all stretched out, it would come out to 60,000 miles for a child, 100,000 miles for an adult. Then there is the engine which pumps the blood, the heart. And it never takes a rest, not even a five. The average heart beats 100,000 times per day, pumping about 2,000 gallons per day. We have our own computer system – the brain. We have our own power plant – we eat food and the body turns the food into energy. We have our own repair system. Should your car get a scratch on it, it will stay there

unless you fix it. But if your body get scratched or injured, your body will seek to fix and repair it. We have our own police and security system which daily wards off many germs and infections. We call it the immune system – and most of the time when a new virus invades us, it will built up antibodies. We have mentioned a few systems. I am told that there are 12 systems in our body including the chemical system the reproductive system, the filtering system. Our body is a miracle, a gift from God. No wonder the Psalmist says in Psalm 139, “For you (God) created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.”

But there is even a greater miracle about you and the 3000 people who were brought to faith on Pentecost Sunday. It takes a miracle to lead you to true repentance and to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, you are a miracle. Yes, it is a miracle that you have faith and are going to go to heaven. You and I by nature do not have the ability and not even the desire to believe in Jesus. By nature we consider the message of Christ’s crucified for our sin as foolishness. We might ignore it, we might be indifferent to it, and we might consider ourselves smarter than the Bible. The Bible says that we are spiritually dead. And dead means dead. Just as a human being who has died cannot bring himself to life, so also we who are dead spiritually cannot bring ourselves to spiritual life. Some of you have memorized how Luther’s Catechism states this Biblical truth, “I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him.”

It will take a miracle. If we are going to come to faith in Jesus, some force from outside of us will have to do it. That was true also for the 3000 people on that first Pentecost. That force is none other than the third person in the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote, “No one can say that Jesus is the Lord except by the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:3) And the way the Holy Spirit brings a person to faith is also awesome. It is through His Word. Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” Peter preached the law. It was not a prosperity gospel. It was Law.

Through that preaching the Holy Spirit accomplished a great thing. He first of all frightened the people about their sins. Don’t think that’s a bad thing. If a person is not concerned about his own sin, he will not be concerned about forgiveness and about the Savior Jesus. Several decades ago a woman in the mid twenties had left the Lord Jesus. She became involved in a very immoral lifestyle. But she came back. When asked why she came back, she answered in a matter of fact kind of way, “I was scared, I was scared I was going to go to hell.” Listen to what happened after Peter preached the law: When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” The Holy Spirit was working in their hearts.

It is not the Holy Spirit’s goal to have you continue to be plagued by your sins. After the thunder of the law came the gentle rain of the Gospel. Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.” What a timely message then and for us now. Repent. Repent does not mean you are sorry mostly because you got caught or that it brought shame upon you and your family. It means you are sorry before the Lord. There are 4 r’s in the broad meaning of repentance:

recognition, (recognition of sin), remorse (remorse before God that we have sinned), remission (forgiveness from God) and renewal (seeking to live a Christ-centered life).

See the blessings God was granting them through the Word and baptism – forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit who works faith. What a miracle occurred that day. There were 3000 people who got up that morning who were not followers of Jesus and had no intention of being followers but when they went to bed that night they were believers in Jesus. 3000 who were spiritually dead but who were brought to spiritual life. What a miracle. Titus also refers to this miracle when he wrote by inspiration, “But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit...”

You are a miracle. You are spiritually alive. You have been brought to faith. For most of us that happened when our parents or sponsors carried us as little babies to the baptismal font. There you were baptized in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. There you received the gifts of forgiveness and faith. I will quote two verses of a hymn written for use when a baby is baptized that is titled, See This Wonder in the Making:

Miracle each time it happens As the door to heaven opens
And the Father beams “Beloved.” Heir of gifts a king would covet.
Here we bring a child of nature, Home we take a newborn creature,
Now God’s precious son or daughter Born again by Word and water.

Maybe you have never thought about it but doesn’t it seem strange and out of order that when the Apostles Creed speaks about the forgiveness of sins, it does not appear under the section about Jesus but in the section about the Holy Spirit. “I believe in the Holy Spirit; the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins...” Now certainly it could appear in the section about Jesus because by His perfect life and by His sufferings and death He has purchased forgiveness. And that truly is a miracle, an act of grace. Forgiveness is there. It becomes personally ours through faith. But the one who brings us to faith is the Holy Spirit. And that is a miracle.

There are so many other things we could say about the Holy Spirit such as He inspired the Scriptures. But we will close with this thought. We spoke about your body being a miracle of God. But there is another miracle. Your body is different from an unbeliever’s body, very different. No, you cannot tell the difference through a medical examination or x-rays or MRI’s or CT scans. But there is a difference. Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit – so says the Word of God.

You are a miracle, you are special. You cannot take the credit. Don’t pat yourself on the back. Rather give thanks and glory to the Holy Spirit.