

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.  
Amen.

You may be seated. So for our last Sunday of Easter, we go into the Book of Acts and we start at the very beginning about what was going on. And this is Luke reporting the birth of the church and the growth of the church from Jesus' resurrection on.

So Luke, of course, writes the Gospel of Luke. He's not an apostle, he's not a disciple, but he did do several interviews. He figured out and he interviewed all the eyewitnesses so that we have a lot of details, especially from Mary, the mother of Jesus, that we don't get anywhere else. And he is writing all of this, a detailed account of what Jesus did, both his life and then what the church did, Peter and the disciples, and then Paul later on. He writes this to somebody named Theophilus.

Now, we're not completely certain whether Theophilus was actually the name of a person or if it was sort of a nickname because Theophilus means lover of God, somebody who loves God. So that could have been a real person's name or it could have just been a Luke describing, "This is who I'm writing to. All of you who love God, this is the story. This is what you need to hear."

So he writes about all the events that are going on, and now we're talking about the very end of things, where all the 11 disciples are gathered together and they've decided ... and they want to continue the ministry of God. And yet, they're short one person because Judas of course, betrayed Jesus. Now, the reason that they're short one person, and the sin and the problem with Judas, is not necessarily that he betrayed Jesus.

You might think that that's the main reason why Judas is absent from this group, that he betrayed Jesus with a kiss. He took gold or he took silver for his betrayal. And while that is indeed significant and he was prophesied that he would be the one who betrayed Jesus, it wasn't the fact that he betrayed Jesus that condemned him, which is fortunate for you and me because if we're honest with ourselves, we have all betrayed Jesus.

Peter himself, when he was standing in the courtyard, denied Jesus three times. In fact, he swore an oath. "I swear to God, I don't know this man." Now, that's pretty blasphemous when it comes right down to it. He betrayed Jesus as well.

And what about the other disciples? When Jesus wanted people around, what did they do? They scattered to the four winds. They betrayed Jesus. And how often have we been ... know we should have said something and didn't? And how often do we know we should not have said something, and we still did?

How many times did we act in a way that was not in accordance with the word of God? How many times did we betray Jesus by not living up to our Christian life and the holiness that he desires for us?

The fact of the matter is each and every one of us has betrayed Jesus. The issue with Judas was that he did not look to his salvation back to Jesus. That was his problem.

See, Judas decided that he ought to try to solve the problem of his betrayal on his own. He took matters into his own hands. He took the silver that he had gotten and he threw it back to the priest. He told the priest that he had sinned against God. And what did they say? "Well, we don't really care about that. That's on you."

So he looked for forgiveness. He looked for redemption in the wrong place. He looked for it in the law. Do this and do that, and God will bless you.

The problem is, none of us can do this and do that perfectly to receive the blessing of God. We all fall short, as did Judas. And Judas in his despair then, took his own life. Not because he betrayed Jesus, but he realized that he could not earn back his redemption.

Now, Peter on the other hand, he couldn't figure out what to do. He did stay within the fellowship of believers. He knew at least that's where he should be. But he didn't try to justify his betrayal to Jesus. He didn't try and explain it away. He didn't try and try harder to overcome his sin. When Jesus finally does show up with them and he talks to Peter, you can just see Peter going, "Okay," and Jesus comes up to him and says, "Peter, do you love me?" And Peter's like, "You know I do." And you're going, "Yeah, right. You just betrayed him just a few days earlier. But yeah, okay, we'll believe you." "You know I love you."

And that's true. We love Jesus, just as Peter does. We've also failed, just as Peter did. And Jesus comes to us and says, "Do you love me? Then feed my sheep." In other words, Jesus restores Peter back into the fellowship. Peter did not try to earn his justification. He received it as a gift from Jesus Christ.

Judas himself could have received that same redemption, but he tried to solve it on his own. He tried to figure it out by himself. He tried to do good works to find hope and peace, rather than looking to the cross, and the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for his hope and his redemption.

So he was missing. He was gone. And so, they had to replace him with another disciple, and they chose Matthias to serve, who had been with them the entire time, so that they could have a faithful eyewitness, which was most important. A faithful eyewitness to the things that God had done. Not that Matthias was any better than ... what was the other guy's name? Justice. Not that he was any better than Justice. It was just this is who God had chosen to serve in the position of apostle.

And then God Himself decides to choose another, Paul, later on and bring him into the apostleship. Almost as if a dozen isn't enough, we need a baker's dozen. So just to make sure that enough gets out there, that the word of God goes forth and accomplishes what He desires, which is the confidence that the testimony that we have received from these 12 men and Paul is true. That God sent His son to die for us and that He has saved us by the efforts of His son.

Because if we don't believe that, then we're in the camp of Judas calling God a liar. You can't save me. I'm going to save myself. I don't need your death. I'm going to do it by good works. I'm going to find confidence of my salvation in the things that I do, rather than what God has done for me.

And so, when we recognize, when we are honest with ourselves and recognize, that we have indeed fallen short of the glory of God, we look to the events of Judas and Peter and recognize that it is only by His grace that we are saved and that all of our sin, all of the betrayal, is forgiven in Christ. And so therefore, we know that He hears us and listens to us.

See, when Jesus rose into the heavens, he didn't just sit there and rest on his laurels like, "Okay, my job's done. Let's see what happens." Now he sits there at the right hand of God and what is he doing? He's advocating for us. He's speaking into the ear of the Father, reminding the Father, "Yeah, they betrayed you, but I died for them. My redemption is theirs and I gave it to them freely. You can hear them, you can save them," which is what Jesus was praying right here in John.

It's called this high priestly prayer. And he prays that God would keep them and guard them in the one true faith. That God would enable them to speak to the nations. That God would protect them, even though the world despises them and hates them. Even though things are not going to go easy for any of the apostles. They're all going to die martyrs deaths, except John and he gets exiled.

This is not an easy life that we are called to, but it's a temporary life. As Jesus said in his prayer, we are not of this world. We are in the world, but we're not of the world. Our citizenship is elsewhere. Our citizenship is with God in paradise, for all eternity.

So while we wait for the full consummation of our homecoming, we endure here by the grace of God, and we are strengthened for that journey in all that we say and do, by His words coming to us. By the word and sacrament given to us freely for the strengthening and nurturing of our faith, so that we can go before God with all confidence and ask Him anything we desire and He will give it to us.

I know I need to clarify that a little bit. Anything that we desire, what does that mean? Well, if we're seeking the will of God, if we want what God wants, then what is our desire? Our desire is that God's will would be done in this world. That

MAY 12, 2024 SERMON

God's word, that what God wants, would be accomplished, that His grace and mercy and peace would be spread throughout the world. That everybody would know that their sins are forgiven. That's our will.

And in addition to that, we recognize that because God loves us and because He is a loving Father, He also gives us clothing and shoes, house and home, wife, children, and land animals and all that I need to support this body in life. He gives that all to us, and that's great, but it's almost as if that's an afterthought because the most important thing that we receive is the forgiveness of sins, the confidence that we are His children and that He loves us. And if we know our Father loves us, then we know He's going to give us everything we want, which is what He gives to us. Now, we may want a few things that go beyond His will, but we can be satisfied with what He gives us because we know it is for our good.

And so, even when we're dealing with trials and tribulations and hardships, we can still ask that God's will would be done in our lives, and He will answer that. He will give us the strength, He will give us the courage. He will give us the peace which surpasses all understanding. And ultimately, He will give us a new home where we will be free from the trials and tribulations and sorrows and pains of this world. Where we will be able to rest in the glory of God and in His mercy. May that grace and that mercy and that peace sustain you now and forevermore unto life everlasting. Amen.