**1 Peter 1:3-9 April 19, 2020**

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

Our text this morning comes from our Epistle lesson, 1 Peter 1 here rereading these words. “Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

How could they do it unless they loved you? The coronavirus has brought about a whole new set of responsibilities for parents, spouses, teachers, and really any other vocation. On the fly parents had to become teachers, and adapt their work so that they can do it from home while still taking care of the responsibilities of their own homes that haven’t gone away. How could they do this, unless they loved their children? Unless they loved what they did and saw themselves as an important part of the team and family environment that they worked for? We see evidence of sacrifice and love all around our lives, even in the sports world. Even though sports aren’t being played today, we can look forward to a new football season beginning in the Fall. Or at least we hope we can. So when a football player pushes themselves in the fourth quarter of the final game of the season to run and tackle and get up after getting knocked down, how could they possibly do it, unless they loved the game? When a nurse, and a doctor, haven’t been able to sit down and rest and battle relentlessly through fatigue and pain for the sake of their patients, how could they do it, unless they loved them? In many ways the events of Holy Week and the foundation of the joy of Easter can be summed up with that question. How could Jesus have done what He did, by taking on our human flesh, suffering such pain and persecution, be crucified, die, and rise again, unless he loved the world? Or more personally unless he loved you? He couldn’t. His actions show the evidence of his love, which is what makes this Easter season so special, and why the celebration continues into the second week, and all throughout these 40 days. It’s why, if and when we are able to come back together for public worship we will observe the holy days that we weren’t able to have public services, because the Easter celebration continues, and we have 40 days to celebrate Jesus Christ and his victory over the grave.

In our readings today we see remarkable moments that beg the question, “How could they possibly do that?” In our first reading Peter and the apostles give a clear witness to the life of Christ in the face of the same men who had Jesus killed. They are beaten and charged not to speak in the name of Jesus ever again, and yet we find that they go out and every day, in the temple and from house to house, they never cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. How could they possibly do that unless they truly believed it and it truly happened? How could they possibly do that unless they had faith created in their hearts and the Holy Spirit worked through them?

Our Epistle lesson says. “Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.” How could we possibly do that without the Holy Spirit working in our lives? To have faith to believe that which isn’t seen, and not only to believe it, but to love Jesus Christ and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible. Our Gospel lesson talks about Thomas, the disciple that usually gets a bad reputation. He is after all known as doubting Thomas, when really he is just asking to see something and do something that the other disciples already got to see and do the first time Jesus appeared to them. Jesus shows him the truth and reveals himself to him, saying “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” How could it be possible, to believe without seeing, without the work of the Holy Spirit? It isn’t, which is what makes faith so precious, and so amazing, a gift that is truly priceless.

Baptism is exactly what Peter is talking about in our Epistle lesson when he says “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” Baptism and Easter are joined together in a tight union, because it is in Baptism that we receive the eternal life that Christ won for all eternity by declaring victory over sin, death, and Satan himself by rising from the grave. Paul sums it up in a verse that we all learned in Confirmation class from Romans 6 “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” This is the joy that we celebrate today, even in isolation, even as the lockdown continues and we are in quarantine. It’s what makes reminders of our Baptism so important, as we aren’t able to see the font in our sanctuary, but we can look back on a baptism banner, a baptism certificate or a baptism candle and remember that special day in our lives as God’s children. Baptism is the new birth of water and the Spirit for we, the children of God, born to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. A living and breathing hope of faith in our hearts that was cultivated, strengthened, and preserved through God’s Word and Sacraments, that shows itself in the moments of our lives when we believe in Christ without seeing, when we love Him and rejoice with inexpressible joy here on Earth, looking forward to the joy that is to come. Especially now, as we aren’t able to join together, and we see a world in peril and as Paul puts it, a world that has been “grieved by various trials.” We live in complicated times, where the ramifications of these past weeks will be felt for years to come, but we don’t look to perfect this world and make it a paradise, we look forward to the paradise that was prepared by God for us His children.

Peter describes the inheritance of heaven as imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. That’s the joy that waits for us, but it isn’t the joy we experience now. Easter is the highest point of the Church Year, which means that every other Sunday in one way or another, fails to measure up to the joy we feel on Easter morning. This is only the Second Sunday of Easter, but do we still have the joy? Or is the joy of Easter just **one** of the joys of life? One of the moments that we look forward during the year that stays on the same level as other highlights, other traditions, other special moments that come up each month. Do we equate the joy of our eternal salvation with the same joys that we experience here on Earth? If we do we are comparing the imperishable with the perishable and the undefiled with the corrupted and diseased.

The joy we find here on Earth is perishable, the joys of this world are fleeting and soon gone. Like looking into a fridge and opening up the vegetable drawer, you’ll find that anything that brings joy here in our sinful creation is soon rotting, because it has a shelf life. Because it is corrupted and defiled with sin. But we jump from one thing to another, consuming as much as we can to find any source of joy, despite the true joy of our faith and our life in Christ. Think about the example the apostles have shown to us, of finding joy even in persecution. They rejoice after leaving the presence of the council, they *rejoice* that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus Christ. They rejoice not because they got beaten up, they rejoice not in getting away and living another day her on Earth, but they rejoice because they know that their salvation is found with Christ.

Our response isn’t the same to persecution, instead of rejoicing in the face of trials and tribulations, instead of rejoicing in our sufferings and how they bring us closer to God we rebel. We fight back. The trial becomes too much, and too long, and we don’t want to listen anymore. We let God know that this sort of thing won’t continue or else we won’t be coming back to Church, even if we were able to, even if it will be different than it was before, it doesn’t matter. We won’t do what He wants us to, we will instead just do our own thing and God will be the one to blame. And then the question becomes, how could you possibly make those demands of God, give ultimatums to your creator, and blame, curse, and rebel against the very Son of God who died and rose for you, if you had faith? How could you say that you love God and yet continue in unrepentant sin that you know is wrong? How can you say that you are a Christian, and yet never read the Words of Christ? Never come to the place where He has promised to speak to us and serve us? How could there be faith in the face of such disbelief?

We point the finger at Thomas for doubting, but in reality we fall into the same temptations of disbelief, even when we have the Holy Word of God to reveal to us all that Christ has done. Even when we have the evidence of God’s love in our lives and how God provides for all that we need. It’s in these moments of guilt and shame, that we come before God, even on the Holy days, and the high days of the Church Year, even coming before him in our own homes, we bow our knees in repentance saying “O Lord, have mercy upon me, I don’t deserve your forgiveness” Now how could someone ask for forgiveness, unless they had faith? In humility and confession, we show the evidence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, the very gift of Baptism that was given to us. We show our faith not in our boasting, not in the counting of all the good things that we do, not in our faithfulness and saying “I would never make demands like Thomas did!” No, we show our faith, when we bow our heads, and lay before God our unrighteousness and our sin. And the joy we have, the inexpressible joy that Peter talks about is that the salvation of our souls is found through faith, because it is by the grace of God, and through the faith created by God in our hearts, that we have been saved.

It is an inexpressible joy that you have, in the salvation won for you by Jesus Christ. Stay in that joy, let that joy lead and direct your path and your life, may that joy sustain you in the trials and tribulations, in these hard days, in these different days, in these strange and uncertain days, and in the moments of doubt and mistrust, the moments when you feel Satan’s hand upon you to lash out and blame the very Son of God who died and rose again for you. For how could you possibly make it through this perishable, corrupted, and fading world or sickness and sadness and isolation without God loving you, providing you, and sustaining you? You couldn’t. So thank him, praise him, and hold fast to your faith. Rejoice with all those of faith interconnected by technology. Call them, write them, see them on the computer. They are there for you, especially now. See his love, do not doubt, and look forward to the bright future, and the reception of the treasure, that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.