

## THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

---

The Rev. Robert G. Eaton, Interim Rector  
All Saints' Episcopal Church, San Diego, CA

Jesus said to his disciples, "You are witnesses of these things." But not before he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem." And THEN he said, "You are witnesses of these things."

*O God our Father, Open the eyes of our faith, That we may behold Jesus your Son in all his saving work, his forgiving work, his freeing work, his redeeming work,. And be witnesses. Amen.*

This past Sunday I preached from the lessons to present more fully the two great aspects of the Feast of the Resurrection. Number 1, that Jesus is alive. And Number 2, that we are witnesses.

I talked a lot about how we could be witnesses NOW to the resurrection even if we weren't there when the event originally took place; that there is an equality allowed to us – and even challenges us as disciples -- as Jesus said, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Yet blessed are those who have not seen me risen, and yet have come to believe."

The challenge to us as disciples is to be real, live witnesses to the resurrection, especially within our own believing, and not leave the witnessing, if you will, only to those who WERE there. But then as we saw in the scriptures, and realize even today, there are those among us, perhaps up to 10% of us, who are actually called and gifted to be very intentional and effective witnesses. It almost felt like that witnessing part to our believe in the resurrection could take a back seat to others – in fact I almost thought I heard at that point in my sermon an audible sigh of relief; relief from not having to feel obliged to say anything to anybody!

Let's pick it up from there, shall we?

**April 15, 2018**

You see, The scriptures for the Easter season will just not let us alone. We hear it again, both in Peters talk in Acts, and in the Jesus speaking to his disciples, “You are witnesses to these things.”

It appears we are not off the witnesses job board for the sake of God’s expanding Kingdom. The readings for today underscore there is work to be done by all. And the work is essential to the mission of Jesus, and thus of the Church in all places.

The collect for today is from the same page, quite compatible with the bible’s teaching on all being witnesses.

Just look at it:

We prayed, O God, whose blessed Son did manifest himself to his disciples in the breaking of bread: Is this not what takes place every Sunday here at All Saints as we gather in fellowship around the altar, as the bread and wine are consecrated to be Jesus Body and Blood shared with us?

So the first thing we realized is that the resurrection is on display here today, and you and I are the receivers and the witnesses. That is, you and I are in fact witnesses, and although we may lift up in prayer those called and gifted to be effective proclaimers of this good news to all and any around, God still includes each and every one of us in the joy and work of being witnesses.

Then comes the heart of the collect, that is, the petition, Open we pray thee the eyes of our faith that we may behold him in all his redeeming work.

Suffice it to say the collect is not just asking God to show us what has happened in us – but equally to say we need to see and be active in working to accomplish ALL his redeeming work in others all around you. This is how we engage in his mission.

I’m hoping and praying you are hearing right now that all of us who have believed in the risen Christ are to understand you are called to an active ministry of witnessing, whether you are up and about, or laying in a bed. And that, my friends , is quite possible to do. So what, again, is the core of it?

The collect used the phrase “Gods redeeming work”. We can see what that means in the readings for today.

**April 15, 2018**

In the reading from the Acts of the Apostles today, what is the redeeming work? Well, the story begins actually in Acts chapter 3, with the healing of a man who had been crippled since birth, and who was healed by Peter. This was read on the Wednesday of Easter week. If redemption means to be rescued in some manner, then certainly the healing of this man means he was rescued from being unable to walk for the rest of his life by the power of God, and thus SET FREE to begin a new life with legs that worked. That's redemption. It was not seen as such by the Jewish leaders. This rescue and freedom - combined with the continued preaching regarding the risen Jesus' Spirit --was SO difficult to comprehend, and obviously SO disruptive to the normal order of things in the Temple that Peter and his colleagues, described in the verses just prior today's reading, were put into jail by the priests and temple guards and Saducees. Remember that the Saducees as a Jewish religious party do not believe in resurrection. That's why they are so sad you see. They obviously need some setting free themselves, don't they.

Just in this story alone, Redemption means being set free from illness, from sickness, also from blindness to God's work, being bound by a lack of faith. And then, of course, redemption will mean for Peter and the disciples being set free from false imprisonment. Which they will be.

Do you know anybody today that needs this kind of redeeming work? Perhaps yourself?

This is an aside, but the work of God is so wondrous, I just want to share the irony. I mentioned that the verses prior to what you heard read today describe the imprisonment of the apostles, because the powers that be wanted to stop the proclamation of the risen Jesus. But that didn't stop the Holy Spirit from continuing to redeem others right into eternal life. You will recall that the Holy Spirit worked through Peter's evangelistic preaching on the day of Pentecost and as a result at least 3000 people chose to believe in Jesus and were baptized.

But here's the rest of what happened, moving to Chapter 4 starting at verse 2,

<sup>2</sup>They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. <sup>3</sup>They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. <sup>4</sup>But many

**April 15, 2018**

who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.

This story was not long after the day of Pentecost. It could have been a few days, maybe a week, or a month. But now, with this witness already proclaimed, and the power of God in tandem with God's real life redeeming work, another 2000 people came to believe, be baptized and join the Body.

You just can't keep a good Holy Spirit down. This is the stone, said Peter quoting Psalm 118, rejected as worthless, and yet has become the cornerstone.

And one final item from the reading in Acts, is the use by Peter of the word salvation, which can be defined with differentiation, but here is being used synonymously with the same redeeming work of Christ. For us today, Peter is saying without equivocation, that if you want to be redeemed from being bound by something, then the only one who can accomplish that is in fact, Jesus Christ, of whom we are witnesses to his resurrection. Our worship and our mission are so very clear.

Redemption for Micah, from his prophecy read as our Old Testament lesson, is the setting free that God does from the wars we suffer rather than the Peace that is really part of God's plan. Need it be said that there are personal wars with others, and there are private wars within us no one knows of in which we may be bound up? In the end, even some of those who all have actually come to peace and lived in peace will have that peace shattered if they do not walk in the name of the Lord God Almighty whose name is Yahweh.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus sets forth the redeeming work of salvation and provides the two items necessary: repentance and forgiveness of sins. Repentance is our desire to be free and the commitment to walk apart from those actions and beliefs in us that keep us bound. The forgiveness of sins is the work of God in providing FREEDOM from being bound by sin.

And one other thing that binds us like glue, that is, the shackles of bitterness brought through unforgiveness, ours towards others who have offended us.

And then Jesus last words in today's reading, that we who believe are to be the ones who share the Good News of freedom, being set free, being redeemed, receiving salvation. Yes, speaking to his apostles, but yes, speaking to all those

**April 15, 2018**

who have not seen and yet believe. You and me, We, as Paul would later use the word, are ambassadors of this holy eternal and incarnate redeeming. Good news of Redemption from so many things that keep us bound up, that as the benefit of Jesus destroying death, and rising from the dead to life, We would Be Set Free, by By God's Mercy and His Love for us,

A love and mercy we are to share with others.

With those words, which we welcome after Lent, and during this season of the Resurrection of Jesus, we must be reminded that we might just be the ones who need to step forward in faith and receive that very power for being released in Jesus. His redemption meant for us. So let me encourage you to do just that: If there is something in your life that is binding you, keeping you from fullness of movement, expression, joy in the resurrected Jesus you believe in, then it is time for you to witness to yourself the redeeming work of Jesus, and pray to be set free.

And then there is the witnessing thing. Our nodding heads do not equate with being active witnesses. It is so important for you to believe that God might actually work through you in some way to proclaim God's redeeming work of freedom for those that we know darn well are all bound up physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually.

Don't we all know somebody in such constriction? Then you are the one.

But if I am not the evangelist, then how can I so easily enter into this witness to the redeeming work of Jesus in others? Well, first I would say what Paul said, Be ready to say who Jesus is to you. But here is something we are actually all called into doing.

And that is to intercede for those others you see are bound up in some way.

You as a believer are authorized to pray in the same way Jesus did. But Who am I to say even in prayer and intercession, Be healed. Be set free. Just remember, it is not about YOUR authority, it is the authority of Jesus Christ, and that Name, the name of Jesus is the fear of shackles everywhere.

**April 15, 2018**

Jesus wants you to be his witness in prayer for others. This is not the easy way out of that evangelism, brothers and sisters. This is an acceptable work in the Lord, and one that marks the true Church everywhere.

And you don't even have to let the person know that you are praying for them, nor do you need their permission to do so. Just to point that out, let's go back

to that healing story of the crippled man. Acts, chapter 3. What a moment. Peter saw the man, lame. Peter looked at him. Without asking him if he wanted to be healed, or even what his name was, Peter healed him. The man didn't ask and he got healed anyway. Why? Because an ambassador of Jesus took note of his being bound up, and chose to act in the name of Jesus.

WE can see people set free, in the power of Jesus Christ, risen. Prayer is such a very simple tool for our proclamation of redeeming work, being set free: It goes like this:

- 1) You know someone who needs freed from something.
- 2) You pray. You pray in the Name of Jesus that they are freed.

Would you act on this this week? Pray for someone to receive the redeeming work of God from whatever is their binding, in Jesus Name.

Lets pray for them right now. Lord, we give you thanks and praise for your beloved daughters and sons. We thank you for the redeeming work of healing, being set free, and salvation that you desire to give to the person we are now considering. Praying in the Name of Jesus Christ, and with his power and authority, I command the shackles or their unbelief that have caused such pain or hopelessness to be released; to go now and go quietly to the foot of the cross of Jesus, never to bind again. And now I pray for the Holy Ghost to be released INTO this area redeemed, healing the very cause of it. Thank you Father for what you are doing at this very moment. Thank you most holy Jesus for your mission to us. Amen.

And now you carry it forward. Let's see what the Lord can do in that kind of mission this week, at your hands.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

**April 15, 2018**

**April 15, 2018**