

American Lutheran Church of Sun City

The Third Sunday of Easter

April 13 – April 14, 2024

Rev. Scott Klimke

Acts 3:12-19

1 John 3:1-7

Luke 24:36b-48

Last Sunday after we were gathered together here for worship Julia, and I took her dad Fred over to Lake Pleasant. It was a nice afternoon and on Monday morning, and I was trying to figure out where I would take Fred next. I thought I might take him over to the state park that commemorates the firefighters who lost their lives in the line of duty but discerned that that might require a little more mobility to get around the paths and such.

Instead, I took Fred over to South Mountain and I must confess that as we began climbing up that mountain neither one of us was mindful of what we were going to encounter, eventually we figured it out. Up on the mountain at every Lookout you could imagine and along all the roadways were people just itching to get a sight of the eclipse that was going to happen at 11:20.

We hadn't even thought about that Eclipse when we parked the car.

Thankfully we met some nice people from California, and they gave us these shades and so I can tell you that by my estimation when the eclipse achieved its fullest realization here in the Phoenix area the moon covered up about 2/3 of the sun. I can't say that I had a particularly strong spiritual reaction to the eclipse but evidently, I've come to know that people around the country derived a certain sense of security from the eclipse. With things so dysfunctional here down below the sun evidently it was reaffirming to see that nature at least still works like clockwork as we ourselves are so often caught in gridlock. Evidently seeing two massive heavenly bodies come together like two dancers in a Fred Astair movie left some people so confident about the future that in the state of Arkansas nearly a hundred couples got married at the time of the eclipse. Pledging to treat one another as once in a lifetime experience and also pledging to treasure each of their moments together as shooting stars or fleeting stars. Maybe the eclipse also left you feeling secure but maybe you also were left feeling small before nature's immensity.

I know that later in the week when Fred, Julia and I traveled to the Grand Canyon I was left feeling small. When you look out on that expanse you can't help but feel small very small. If the author of Psalm 8 when he looked at a star lit sky was led to feel small, anybody who takes in that mile long

natural wonder is probably going to feel small, and I'd suggest to you this morning that feeling a bit small probably gets us in the right mood for our selected scriptures. There's a theme that runs through the word of God we've heard this morning that starts with an R ends with an E. What word do you think is on big time display today. It's become kind of a dirty word I think in the church but it's an important word. It's the word repentance.

Repentance is encouraged by all our readings, and this really and truly is a huge theme in our Gospel Luke this morning and also in the second volume written by Luke in the New Testament Acts of the Apostles. If you read these two books, you'll come to understand that for Luke the Evangelist Church tradition calls the beloved physician the mission of the church today and always has been to encourage and sustain repentance in people's lives.

In Luke we don't hear on Easter Sunday go and make disciples of all Nations baptizing them teaching them. What we hear is go and tell all nations to repent and enjoy the forgiveness the repentant can have in me Jesus Christ the son of God. Repentance is a huge deal in Luke and in Acts because for this evangelist Easter and Christ's subsequent exaltation to the right hand of the God settles all debate. After Easter and Ascension Day there is no longer any debate about who is the King of kings and Lord of

lords. The King after Easter and Ascension Day is Jesus. If Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords forever, it's about time we all repent and acknowledge His reality as Lord. Repentance at the end of the day involves this: it involves turning away from all the false pursuits, all the false gods that have occupied in us in the past and turning towards Jesus and His superior and alternative plan for living. And if we really do turn away from all of our false wisdom in the past to the wisdom, we receive not from ourselves but in Jesus, it does knock us down a peg or two. It does enable us to occupy our britches again. It leaves us mighty small before the Jesus whom scripture says every tongue will confess as Lord and every knee will bend before as Lord.

Repentance brings us down to size and helps us remember that we're not the way the truth and the life. Jesus is, and in my humble opinion being brought down to size is a good bit of what the American public needs right about now. Why do you think we're so bitterly divided as a people? Why do you think we wag our fingers at one another and scream at one another and call each other unamerican. It's because we're all riding our high horses. It's because we all need to repent and get over ourselves. Amen. I recently ran across a quote I'd never seen before, but the philosopher Emanuel Kant. I used to like his work quite a lot in college. I haven't read him in a long time.

He once said that all human beings are made from twisted lumber. There's not a single one of us that would come out plumb and prime if we were examined by someone who knows what perfection is, and maybe if we're all made out of twisted lumber, maybe we might want to remember more often that our ideas are made out of the same stuff as us, Twisted Lumber. If you're twisted lumber are you going to produce many prime plumb and perfect ideas straight out of the gate? I think not. It would be good for all of us to repent. It's the only way I think we're ever going to come back together again and get out of this gridlock business, get out of this demonization business.

I hope it happens soon but as I lift up the positives of repentance this morning, I also have to tell you there's a potential downside to repentance. A potential mistake in our calculations we can make about repentance is when repentance makes sinners like you and me feel small. Like wee creatures. When repentance makes us feel small and brings us down to size we may come to the false conclusion that small is bad and big is good.

I have to tell you that if you ever walk about in the cathedrals of Europe you will see that this whole idea that God and the good are big and the sinful like us is small comes across pretty strong. You walk around in a cathedral in Europe and you're going to have to tilt your neck up to see the

ceiling and even then you might not even see it. What's the point being made there architecturally? God and the good are big mammoth and we little small people are bad. you think that's how it works that big is good and small is bad is that how it goes I agree with you I don't think it's how it goes but I can tell you this mistake has been made again and again and again throughout the history of the church.

Read the Gospel of Luke and you'll get some interesting background to today's reading from acts. At one point the disciples go to Jerusalem with Jesus and they see the temple built there. It's big beautiful and they say to Jesus in this temple "isn't this building big beautiful, and wonderful isn't God all wrapped up with the big and the beautiful" and Jesus says to them "you haven't learned a thing this big, beautiful thing that you associate with God it's going to fall to the ground. The one who's going to last forever, the one whose words are going to endure forever is me. I wasn't born in a palace. I was born in a barn and on the day of my crucifixion it's going to look like I'm mighty small but I'm not. I'm going to be the Lord of lords King of Kings."

Do you see the bad calculus that can go on here? God is big, the beautiful is big, and the small... what the world would call weak, what the world would call insignificant is bad. That's not how it really goes. That brings us to our

reading from acts today. Maybe, just maybe the disciples listen to what Jesus says when he gives them a tongue lashing about the temple in the Book of Luke.

This is the setup for the reading from acts. The disciples are walking into the temple. They're entering a place that's called "The Beautiful." The beautiful gate and at the base of the beautiful gate they find a pauper, a peasant, a lame man that's been forced to lay there day after day after day saying give me some scratch. I don't care where it comes from. Canada or not, give me some scratch.

Now the disciples this time don't buy the hype even though this gate is called "Beautiful." They think to themselves how can you call a religious structure beautiful when right before it you have a representative of all the people who've slipped through the cracks as this big and beautiful building has been built and maintained. The disciples think the only way you can call this beautiful is if you forget the parable Jesus once told when he said there was once a peasant a popper named Lazarus. He lay before the gate the quote unquote beautiful gate of the big and palatial palace of this rich man who stepped over Lazarus every day and went into his house and stuffed his gut full of food. Except the parable ends here. Lazarus ends up in heaven and the rich man is in hell so how could this supposedly big and beautiful

rich man been actually big and beautiful if he would have gotten out and shared some of his largest with someone who need needed it more. If you're going to follow Jesus you got to be mighty careful that you don't confuse beauty with the big. The excessive with the palatial for a follower of Jesus. The stuff that ends up being big, the stuff that ends up being beautiful is found in small probably not noticed probably not written about service to those who have slipped through the cracks.

An homage to that little hymn of the day we sang today are you folks ready to be servants are you ready to recognize that for followers of Jesus the big and the beautiful isn't found where the newspapers say the big and beautiful is found. It's found in small supposedly in-significant self-sacrifice made for others. Are you ready to be those servants? If you're not, I'd suggest they pay close attention to where Jesus is in today's reading from Luke. This is Easter evening and Jesus is still poked full of all the holes he wore on Good Friday. You'd think in the resurrection God would have erased all the signs and marks of the Cross, but that didn't happen. Jesus is still running around on Easter evening poked full of holes. Why is that? It's because in God's estimation the shame the Scorn the suffering of Good Friday isn't that at all. It's love, its grace, its compassion, it's commitment, it's suffering, and sacrifice for others that should be worn like a medal. So,

if you want to follow Jesus might you have to adjust your life a little bit.

Might you have to adjust your expectations a good bit? Might you have to start incurring some bruises and some wounds and some scars and some suffering and some sacrifices made so that others might be brought in from the cold? And then you're going to have to wear that stuff like a trophy.

I hope you do. I'll leave you with this thought: how are you going to do one of those seemingly small and insignificant things that Jesus would have you do this week and trust that eventually it will produce big and beautiful things? Are you going to forgive somebody who hasn't done anything to merit it? Are you going to apologize to somebody even as they continue to aggravate that you know what out of here? What sacrifice, what pound of flesh are you going to forgo so that you might bring somebody in from the cold? I look forward to hearing what big and beautiful things you'll do this week. Amen