

"What Have You Done to Jesus?"

Acts 2:14a, 36-41

May 8, 2011

3rd Sunday Of Easter

What are we to do with Jesus Christ? People have been pondering that question for centuries. People in recent times have attempted to get rid of Jesus, either by denying his very existence (something popular to do, beginning in the 19th century) or by denying His miraculous powers and divine claims. People would like to embrace Jesus as a wise teacher of religion and philosophy, a great moral example, or as a kindly friend.

In our text for today, it's pretty clear what God did with Jesus. Peter says in His Pentecost sermon, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ." In His baptism, in His transfiguration, and in His miraculous acts, God showed that Jesus was Lord, the very Son of God. In His suffering, bleeding, dying, and resurrecting, God showed that Jesus was the Christ, the Savior of the world. This is quite the daring declaration, but it perfectly exemplifies the boldness in the witness of the church after the resurrection. Peter, the loud mouthed coward who had denied Jesus three times before His death, now declares Jesus to be the Messiah, the very Son of God after Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Easter changes things!

But there's more. Peter is even bolder. He goes on to declare what the people had done with Jesus when he says, "this Jesus whom you crucified." He's not addressing just the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Jewish Council. He's saying you – all of you – who were waiting for the Messiah to come and bring life and salvation – YOU crucified your Savior."

And we breathe a collective sigh of relief. We wouldn't want to be on the hook for something like that! We love Jesus – a lot! We would never want to hurt him, much less kill him. So we pass by this text without letting it touch us. We blame those first-century Jews for killing Jesus (with help from the pagan Romans). We shake our heads and assure ourselves that it would be oh-so-different had

we lived back then. We would have NEVER done anything terrible to Jesus. We'd never give the Father reason to shed tears over us! After all, we are Lutherans for goodness sake!

How wrong we are to think that way. The Jews of Jesus' day may have conspired to get Jesus condemned to die. The Romans may have driven the nails through His hands and feet to crucify Him. However, none of that would have happened had Jesus not allowed it. The Son of God could have squashed those Jews and those Romans like bugs on a windshield if he wanted to. They did not put Jesus on the cross. Sin put Jesus on the cross. The sin of every man, woman, and child who has ever lived is responsible for Jesus' crucifixion. Martin Luther, in his *Meditation on Christ's Passion*, put it this way, "When you see the nails piercing Christ's hands, you can be certain that it is your work. When you behold his crown of thorns, you may rest assured that these are your evil thoughts." (p.9) Who killed Jesus? I did! You did. We all did it. Admit it! Confess it! It's true. What Peter said on that first Pentecost is spoken rightly to us all this morning: "God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

Ultimately, though, it doesn't really matter what you have done with Jesus. It's what God the Father does with you that is important. How will He react to you and I crucifying His Son? If you accidentally ran over your neighbor's son on his bicycle and killed him, imagine how bad you would feel and how hurt and angry his father would be.

You and I have deliberately killed the Son of God with our sins of thought, word, and deed; by the evil we have done and the good we have left undone. How bad should you and I feel? We may try to overlook it or deny it because we would like our religion to be more cheerful and uplifting. But that doesn't make it go away. It should absolutely terrify us. It terrified Peter's audience. Our text says that they were cut to the heart with grief and terror. They expected God to be angry so they asked "Brothers, what shall we do?" In other words, what can we do to make this up to God? That's the way we usually do it, too, when we consider our sin and guilt. "God, what shall we do? How can we make it up to you?"

Then an amazing thing happens, both for the people hearing Peter back then and for the people hearing Peter today. God does not smite us for sinning. He does not inflict His wrath upon us for killing His Son. He does not cast us into hell for causing His Son to suffer hell. He doesn't even require us to do anything to make up for it. Rather, He invites us to receive what He has done through His Son's suffering, death, and resurrection.

"Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ," says Peter. Repentance means a complete turning around of mind and heart. The Bible says that this is something that God grants us blind and stubborn sinners who don't even know that we are going in the wrong direction. Through His Word, God stops us from going in the wrong direction and turns us around. That's good, but it doesn't take care of the problem.

Being baptized is also not something we do for God. It is something God does for us to solve the problem. Peter says that baptism is for the forgiveness of sins. The word for "forgive" literally means "to send away." In the water of Holy Baptism, God washes us clean by sending our sins away. How far away? Psalm 103 says, "as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."

On top of that, God gives us a gift in our baptism. Peter says, "You will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Through the entrance of the Holy Spirit into our hearts, we are enabled to believe what God has done for us through the death and resurrection of His Son – namely, to forgive our sins and insure our eternal life. By the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we are empowered to live lives of obedience to God and service to our neighbor.

This promise which God makes in Holy Baptism was not just for the people at Peter's time. It was for their children, no matter the age. It was for people far off – both in space and in time. It is a promise for them then and a promise for us now.

It is this promise in which the early Church, influenced by the joy of Jesus' resurrection, lived. It is this promise in which we, in the Church today, live, as well. Baptism is not an event in our distant

pass, nor is repentance an occasional activity for when we feel bad. Martin Luther said that we, as Christians, are to live lives of daily repentance. This doesn't mean we are to always be involved in a liturgical rite of repentance here in Church. Rather, in our daily lives, we are to be consistently informed by the Word of God and constantly influenced by the Word of God, lest we stray from the way of righteousness that leads to everlasting life.

We do this by returning to our baptism which, although the event occurred a long time ago, still blesses us every day. To understand this, we might compare it to marriage. No one who is married says, "I was married." Rather, a person says, "I AM married", indicating a continual state of being begun by an action in the past. In the same way, we should not say, "I was baptized." Rather, say, "I am baptized", indicating a continual state of forgiveness begun by an action in the past. When confronted by sin and guilt, say, "I am baptized. I am washed. I am forgiven." When confronted by fear or doubt, say, "I am baptized. I have the gift of the Holy Spirit. I belong to Him."

What we do with Jesus is not nearly as important as what Jesus has done with us. We have put Him on the cross because of our sin, but He laid down His life on the cross to forgive our sin. We have daily run away from Him in our sins, but He has granted us repentance through His Word to bring us back to Him. We have sinned against Him, but He has washed us in Baptism to take away our sin. We have disbelieved and doubted Him, but He has given us His Holy Spirit in Baptism so that we might believe what He has done for us in His death and resurrection and not doubt. In our struggle against sin and guilt, when we want to cry out, "What shall we do?", to paraphrase St. Peter's words, "Repent and live in your baptism. You have the forgiveness of sins. You have the gift of the Holy Spirit." This is what God has done with you! Amen.