



1 Timothy 2:3-6

3 This is good, and pleases God our Savior,

4 who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus,

6 who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time.

Special Music: "All are Welcome" Jesse Manibusan

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s64ti_3LerM

A LESSON FROM JUDAS

The unkempt man wearing a soiled and torn dark hoodie had just entered the restaurant door and was speaking with the young hostess stationed at her podium.

“Yes, mam,” he spoke quietly. “I am here to meet a friend. He is saving me a place at his table.”

“Can you tell me the name on the reservation?” replied the woman with a smile.

“I can tell you that, but first I want to tell you that I really shouldn’t be here. You see, I have really let my friend down. He has been such a wonderful friend and yet, I have gone out of my way to give him reasons not to trust me.”

The hostess appeared to be a little confused. This was really more information that she had time to listen to. But she patiently asked, “I understand, sir. But, I still need the name on the reservation in order to help you.”

“I understand that, and I don’t mean to waste your time,” said the man, “but I’m not really sure why I am here. I truly expect for my friend to turn me away. After all, he knows what I have done and I’m not really sure I can face him. You see, there are some really bad people that want to hurt him and make an example out of him. They may even try to take his life. They gave me some money to point him out to them.”

“Sir, are you telling me that there is going to be an unpleasant altercation here in this restaurant? If that is so, then I need to ask you to leave immediately.”

“No, no, no mam. You misunderstand. This betrayal has already happened, and I have arranged for the people looking for my friend to wait until after we leave the restaurant.”

“Well, sir, I will still need the name on the reservation. And there had better not be any trouble.”

“I get that,” the man stammered “and I promise you that nothing will happen here. Still, my friend knows that I am a coward and a thief. He knows that I have taken money to betray him. You can see why I might be a little apprehensive about joining the group at the table.”

“Sir, I still need the name associated with the reservation. Do you know how many people are in your friend’s party?”

“Oh, sure. I’m sorry,” the man said apologetically. “I really don’t mean to be so flakey. I’m just nervous.”

“I can see that,” the hostess replied.

“The reservation should be under the name Jesus, and the number of people in the party is about 7.5 billion. Wait! I see my friend. He is waving to me. It looks like he saved me a seat after all. How can he do that considering all I have done and will do, he has saved a place for me at his table. He loves me so very much in spite of all my shortcomings. Thank you so much for your help, mam. By the way, my friend will be picking up the check. I will go over and join him now.”

The hostess spoke as the man walked towards his friend’s table. “You are quite welcome, sir. Enjoy your dinner.” She could not help thinking what a strange little man she had been speaking with. And she couldn’t help but wonder at the kindness, generosity and grace of his friend.

Rev Walt

He is Risen! He is Risen indeed!

I sat at my desk pondering this message for Easter Day, 2021. A day that we set aside our differences and celebrate our Risen Lord in union. He is risen! He is risen indeed! Most of us put away the pain and agony of the cross as we join Peter, John and Mary in wonder at an empty tomb and a risen savior. So many of us turn our thoughts to colored eggs, bunnies, candy, and cute baby chicks. Then our thought turn to going to church for Easter, even if we haven't been in a while, and what we should wear, as if Jesus cares whether we wear the yellow dress or the orange tie. And throughout the service our minds wander to the ham cooking at home and if we have enough food for everyone. We dread doing the dishes. And Jesus seems to take a backseat to the other activities of the day. That is to say, many of us set their relationship with God on the back burner as the bustle of the day overtakes the reason for the day. After all, this is Easter. A day of celebration that takes our mind away from the pain of holy week and allows us to join in the ecstatic joy of our risen Savior. We feel a great weight lifted off of our shoulders as we hear the Angel's words again:

“Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.”

As those words seemed to overshadow the darkness that we talk about through Holy Week with the betrayal, denial, desertion and crucifixion and Jesus' words of

“Father, forgive them. They know not what they do.”

It is almost as if we give ourselves permission to put our guilt in a box, tie it up with a string and hide it behind other boxes in the closet so that we can pull it out next year.

I don't mean to be callous, but the truth is, we lose so very much when we allow these things to relegate Jesus to just another activity for the day. It's human to lose our perspective and forget why we find church important on Easter Day. Why Easter day and not other Sundays? And why are we talking about “Lessons from the Table” on Easter morning anyway? Didn't we already put the guilt box away until next year? We want set aside all the painful moments of the week before and put on our party hats.

Stop. Pause. Breathe. Reset.

He is Risen! He is Risen indeed!

Throughout this entire series we have talked about the table. We have talked about Jesus' suffering. We have talked about His time in the Garden. We have talked about how Jesus spoke to His disciples again about the events unfolding around them. We have talked about how our perceptions regarding the Last Supper and the final week of Jesus before His death on the cross. We have spoken about how our western culture has given us a warped view of the way things actually were.

In our excitement as we celebrate our risen Lord, we forget that the picture is much bigger than just the crucifixion and the resurrection. There was so much going on. Sometimes, the story becomes so cluttered that we lose focus. Yes, we need to focus on Jesus, the trial, the scourging, the humiliating march through the streets of Jerusalem, the brokenness and the blood. We need to focus on Calvary and Jesus' last breath. We also certainly need to embrace the joy of the resurrection.

But we can't let the back story get lost. The Table, Judas, Peter, Thomas, John, the bread, the wine, the hymn and the prayers in the garden. Every piece of the story has to be joined together to give us a true picture. By connecting all the dots, we find that we are a part of that picture. We are Judas. We are Peter. We are Thomas. We betray, we deny, and we doubt. And when Jesus Speaks those words:

“Father, forgive them. For they know not what they do.”

He’s not just talking about the soldiers, the priests, his followers, and the mob surrounding Him. He’s also talking about us. Because, without us, without the failings and sins of humanity, none of this would have been necessary. Each and every one of us contributed to this moment.

On this Easter Sunday morning, why would we want to even think about Judas? After all, isn’t he the bad guy in this story? Why would we want to remember how Peter, as much as he loved Jesus, would deny him when the chips were down? Why would we consider the human nature of Thomas who doubts the resurrection? Doesn’t that diminish the sacrifice of Christ on the cross and the joyous celebration of the resurrection?

I want you to embrace what I am about to say. Without Judas. Without Peter. Without Thomas. Without... us. The cross and the resurrection lose meaning. Without the crucifixion, there can be no resurrection. We lose sight of the fact that God’s plan from the very beginning, was for Jesus Christ to be a living sacrifice for all people, not just the good guys, not just the people that we think might be deserving.

5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus,

6 who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time.

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

We don't get to make the rules. We are not the ones that sit in judgement here. If it were left up to us, we would want to see Judas pay for his betrayal, Peter suffer for his denial, and Thomas shunned for his disbelief. Each one of them suffered in their own way. Each had to deal with their guilt and regrets.

When they are all in the garden and Peter pulls out his sword and cuts off the ear of the soldier, we want to cheer because we see Peter standing up to bullies. But Jesus tells him, with compassion, that that is simply not the way he wants him to do things.

"Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword."

And then He heals the soldier. We want Jesus to play by our rules and standards and it is so frustrating when He doesn't. We want to step into the moment and cut off a few ears ourselves. Part of that is our rage. Part of that is our guilt. We want to decide who sits at the Table of our Lord. Our mind tells us that we do that in order to protect Jesus. To protect our belief system. To protect our traditions. But, in truth, we do it for our own edification and our desire to feel superior. We let the events and people surrounding us drive the humility, compassion, and grace right out of us.

Isaiah the prophet is so very spot on when he tells us:

**“For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,”
declares the Lord.**

Who are we to tell God how He should interact with us? It's His plan, His way, His choice, His son, His sacrifice, His CREATION.

Jesus and God the Father had a connection that is best described as Father and Son, even though it was so much more. Jesus knew His purpose and the cost of fulfilling that purpose. Most of us could never imagine, much less process the amount of mental, physical and spiritual abuse that Jesus faced through the events that pivotal week in history. Being rejected and betrayed by His closest

friends, during the time of His greatest need, is agonizing for us to visualize as we reflect on how we would handle those same events and relationships.

All that being said, I truly believe that most painful moment that Jesus suffered occurred in those last few seconds before He died. In that final moment on the cross, Jesus took the sins of the entire world onto his bleeding body and battered soul; past, present, and future. It must have been something like being caught in a whirlpool as it sucked him under, and His Father let go of His hand. And He was utterly alone as He descended into Hell.

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

That moment, when the relationship that had bound them together since the beginning of time, severed, as He became ALL SIN of ALL PEOPLE and unable to stay in the presence of His perfect Father. The loneliness and sense of betrayal as He descended in the depths of hell for the very same people that had just crucified him, carrying the sins of everyone, including you and me. A burden that we can never know because He took that burden from us.

We forget that He took those sins and laid them at the feet of Satan in Victory and rose from the dead; pure, sinless, unburdened. When that stone was rolled away and Jesus emerged from the tomb, victorious over death, victorious over

sin, victorious over Satan, that is the reason that we celebrate this day. Without the cruel reality of the preceding week, there is no celebration. You simply cannot have one without the other.

That celebration is a celebration of love for all of humanity. And the story that we tell is a story for all people everywhere. God truly does not expect for us to come to the Lord's Table after we clean up our acts. The first step we take on our journey into a relationship with Jesus Christ is admitting that we are not perfect, that we are sinful by nature. But that does not keep us from the table. It did not keep Judas, Peter, or Thomas from the table. We have to walk through that restaurant door, just like Judas in our story today. We have to admit that we realize who we are, imperfect and sinful, but it does not keep us from His Table of grace.

We aren't merely observers. Jesus is expecting us. He has a chair waiting for us as participants at the table. He is there to serve us. He is there to raise us up. He is there to be an example to us about how He expects us to live our lives. He is not going to force us to eat or drink. But He is graciously blessing and providing the bread of forgiveness and the cleansing wine of grace.

Jesus paid it all.

All to him I owe.

Sin hath left a crimson stain.

He washed it white as snow.

Elvina M. Hall

Jesus didn't just pay for the sins of those who believe. He paid for the sins of everyone. Jesus didn't invite the sinless to the table. He invited everyone. What does it take for us to understand that we are not holy bouncers for Christ. He never called us to be holy bouncers. He called us to love one another, even as He loved us. Our mission has never been to keep others out, but to bring others in. Our charge has never been to exclude those who don't agree with us, but to include everyone. If we keep people from the table, how can they know the price Jesus paid and the free gift of salvation.

This table is for everyone. And for us who believe, it is our greatest example of how God loves each and every one of us as we allow His spirit to move through us and share His table with everyone around us.

Let us gather together in unity through communion. For All are Welcome at this table.

AMEN

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