

EASTER PEOPLE LIVE UNDER FORGIVENESS –
Sermon for April 26, 2009
By Pastor Vern Oestmann

(Chalk Board) – write a list of sins

Martin Luther had a dream one evening. In that dream he saw an angel writing a list of sins, Martin's sins, on a blackboard. The list went on and on. Martin became very disturbed and began to toss and turn. He felt the guilt of every sin he had committed. It was staring him in his face. Shamed, filled with guilt, Luther cried out in his sleep, "Forgive me." As his dream continued, he saw a hand above the blackboard. The hand had a pierced hole in it, and from it blood flowed. The blood began to wash the list of Martin's sins away. As Luther awakened from his dream in amazement he exclaimed: "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses me from all my sin."

That was a turning point for Luther. He began to search the scriptures to understand God's grace. Luther became an Easter person who lived under forgiveness. How about you?

The list of our sins can easily be written on this chalk board as I have done. All of us have sinned and all of us fall short of the glory of God. None of us deserve forgiveness. None of us can cleanse ourselves from these sins. It's like the hands of a clock that always move clockwise or the pages of a calendar that mark the days of the week and the weeks of the month. Once past, there is no return. We can not go back in time to undo what was said, thought, or done. For us there is no eraser, or rewind. But, there is forgiveness. Forgiveness wipes the slate clean. The Psalmist writes, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12).

What God has done is amazing, totally astonishing. We are washed in the blood of the Lamb. Jesus Christ died on that old rugged cross to forgive everyone of their sins. Scripture says, "Christ died once for all" (1 Peter 3:18).

We sang this morning the song, "Worthy is the Lamb." It started this way: "Thank you for the Cross, Lord. Thank you for the price You paid, Bearing all my sin and shame in love You came and gave amazing grace. Thank You for this love, Lord. Thank You for the nail pierced hands, Wash me in Your cleansing flow. Now all I know; Your forgiveness and embrace. Worthy is the Lamb."

"Now all I know, Your forgiveness and embrace. Worthy is the Lamb." What a powerful testimony to Living as Easter people under forgiveness! That is God's amazing grace that flows down and covers me. Wow!

When Peter healed the lame man the people were astonished at what they saw. They couldn't believe it. And Peter said, "Why do you wonder at this? (Acts 3:12) And then he went on to tell them of the miraculous power of God who raised Jesus from the dead. And He and John were witnesses of this – and by their faith in Jesus they healed the lame man. And Peter continued to share faith with them, pointing to Jesus as the fulfillment of all the Old Testament. And Peter called them to repent and turn again to God that their sins may be blotted out.

John writes in his epistle these words that were read as our second lesson from 1 John 3. This is what was written: "You know that He (meaning Jesus) appeared to take away sins, and in Him there is no sin. No one who abides in Him keeps on sinning..." (v. 6) And then he concludes with these words, "Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as He (meaning Jesus) is righteous" (v. 7). We are sinners and we sin

every day, but there is forgiveness as we turn to Jesus and repent of our sin. Forgiveness flows over us and covers us to assure us that God loves us and does not forsake us.

Yet, there are those who doubt. There are those who have doubt. They doubt that God can forgive them. Thomas had doubts if Jesus really arose from the grave. It wasn't until he placed his finger into the nail-pierced hand of Jesus and his hand into the spear-torn flesh of Jesus that he believed and exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!"

Peter was also a doubter. Remember his fleeting faith the day Jesus invited him to walk on water? The waves came and Peter lost his faith and trust in Jesus at that moment by taking his eyes off Him. The waves were saying to Peter, "You'll never make it. You'll never win." And down Peter went. But Jesus reached out His hand to him and raised him up.

That wasn't the only time Peter doubted. In the courtyard he doubted that led to fear that led to denial. And in bitter anguish he ran away. But Jesus came to Peter once again and raised him up with the same question asked three times, "Peter, do you love me?" And upon Peter's answers, Jesus raised Peter up to be a strong, courageous, and bold witness of faith. Just as Thomas believed and was living as an Easter person under forgiveness, so was Peter.

What about you? Have you ever doubted if God forgives you? DO you still worry about a sin or sins of the past that keep you from living as an Easter person under forgiveness? Maybe you have tried several times to get out of the boat and walk on the water and find yourself listening to the waves say to you, "You can't make it. God won't forgive you. You can't win."

But you know what, there's a stronger voice out there you can listen to. It's the voice of God. The voice of God says to you, "Do not be afraid. I am with you. I am here to hold you up, to guide you, to protect you, to comfort you, to silence your doubts and fears, your guilt and shame. I died for you and I rose from the grave so you can have life!" What voice will you choose to listen to?

Living as Easter people under forgiveness is living under God's amazing grace, knowing that your sins are washed with the blood of the Lamb who is worthy. As that forgiveness flows down over you, washing away all your sin, God is speaking a message of love. How majestic are His whispers. How great and wonderful is his love. How awesome is our God!

The message of repentance and forgiveness was proclaimed thousands of years ago and it continues to be proclaimed today so that followers of Jesus may live as Easter people under forgiveness every day.

The Lord is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia! Amen.