

Sermon: 3rd Sunday of Easter

Text: Acts 3:11-21 (vv.19,10)

Theme: Times of refreshing

Goal: The resurrected Christ gives us times of refreshing when He forgives us and abides with us

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Are you in need of a time of refreshing? I was in need after what had happened to me in the Holy Week. And my wife and I had some very good, refreshing time last week as we spent three days in Kleinmond. And we didn't have to pay anything for it. It was free. As a theologian I can say: It was by grace! Thank you.

Sickness, stress, a bad conscience, too much work, concerns about our future... lead us to a point when we need some time of refreshing, not only for our body, but specially for our souls, an enduring refreshment that only God can give us. This is one of the reasons while we come to the church and gather around the Holy Table: To receive God's refreshment.

The lame man seated at one of the gates of the temple in Jerusalem could never expect to get the kind of refreshment he received from Peter and John. He was just asking for some alms, and he received healing in the name of Jesus. *Peter took advantage of the opportunity to preach the Gospel* (ABC 1305) to the astonished people who gathered around them as they saw the miracle. He offered to them times of refreshment offered by Jesus. But some steps were necessary to be followed to get the true refreshment.

I – Repent

Peter didn't claim that he and John were powerful men able to

perform the miracle. On the contrary, he gave all credit and honour to Jesus. People knew Jesus of Nazareth and they had seen many miracles performed by Him. But even Jesus was not just a healer. And Peter went straight to the point: *Do you know who this Jesus is? He is the promised Messiah, the Holy and Righteous One, the Prophet that Moses talked about, the Author of Life, the Son of God - the God of our fathers Abraham, Jacob and Isaac. And you disown Him before Pilate... you killed Him!*

Peter used harsh words to accuse people of their sins and to call them to repentance. Without repentance, there is no refreshing time! – I'm always concerned how polite and patient a pastor must be with the sins of his congregants. In our culture, if I preached as harsh as Peter preached, or if I went to some of you and started to blame you because you are sinning against the third Commandment or any other, you would probably never come to church again. I preach the Law, and I have to do it, and my prayer is that the Holy Spirit directs the words to the right hearts calling each of you (and myself daily) to repentance, back to the right way. To be a Christian does not only mean to perform some duties; but, as Luther said at his first of the 95 Theses: *"When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said: 'Repent!' He called for the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."*

II – Turn to God

"Repent and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out," is Peter's appeal. Even the big sin of the people disowning Jesus before Pontius Pilate and asking for the crucifixion of the Son of God could be forgiven. Many of the crowd listening to Peter's sermon were among the multitude gathered on Good Friday crying: "Crucify Him, Crucify Him!" Peter not only accused them; but Peter called them back to God so that their sins may be wiped out by the grace of Jesus. They could never have repaired the damage done. Only God

could reconcile them with Himself again and give peace to them through repentance, faith and forgiveness. And Peter explained to them that even what happened had been in God's plan, as His Messiah had to suffer and died on behalf of humankind to take away the sin of the world. Peter mentioned the prophecies about the suffering Messiah and said: *"But this is how God fulfilled what He had foretold through all the prophets, saying that His Christ would suffer...but God raised Him from the dead. We are witnesses of this!"*

The resurrection of Christ caused such a huge transformation in the life of the apostles, as we heard last Sunday, that they were now able to testify with boldness that the humble Jesus of Nazareth was really the promised Messiah. The resurrected Christ had explained them how the prophecies were accomplished in Him, and that a new era was beginning, as we heard in the Gospel for today: "Then Jesus opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them: "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things." (Luke 24:45-48). Peter's sermon just shows us how true the words of Luke are – then and nowadays. And John, in today's Epistle, states: "But you know that he (Jesus) appeared so that He might take away our sins" (1 John 3:5).

III – Times of refreshing

And now comes the detail in our text that I really like, because the term used here is unique in the account of the New Testament: "Repent, then, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you – even Jesus." It is not just a matter of repentance and forgiveness, of Law and Gospel; but the result of repentance and forgiveness is "times of refreshing"

that come from God. We can relax and enjoy the peace God gives us through faith in Jesus in such a way that we can say: ha, it is well, very well with me, because God is with me; Jesus is my Saviour. Maybe we can link this “refreshing” with Psalm 23, where we confess: “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul” (he refreshes my soul). And God is still sending His Christ to us in His Word and in the Holy Communion. The living Christ is a reality, present with us refreshing our souls!

Conclusion: Can you understand why I mentioned at the beginning of the sermon the good experience of the free “times of refreshing” we enjoyed last week? - When we turn to God in repentance and by faith in Jesus, we are in God’s hand and everything is free, just to enjoy. We live in His kingdom of justice and peace, walking in His ways willingly, because we know that His will is the best – not our will. We love God and we love our fellows, beginning with our family, and going through our Christian family to the entire world. We know and believe that when we fail and sin, God is always ready to forgive for the sake of Jesus. We can enjoy the times of refreshing in fellowship with Jesus and with our brothers and sisters in Christ, being witnesses of His love to all and of what He did through Jesus to call people back to Him, - even the greatest sinner. No sin is big enough that cannot be forgiven by God’s grace in Jesus, bringing times of refreshing to the sinner. If you have any doubt, don’t resist the Holy Spirit; but believe in the words of our text: “Repent, then, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you – even Jesus.” Amen.