Easter 6A 2020 God’s Word gives Life to His children

1 Peter 3:13 – 22

13 Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? 14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, 15 but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, 16 having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. 17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.

18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, 19 in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, 20 because they formerly did not obey, when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. 21 Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

John 14: 15 - 21

15 “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, 17 even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

18 “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 19 Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. 20 In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. 21 Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”

Why is it when Christians suffer for doing good, they don’t retaliate? How was it possible for Stephen to cry out with a loud voice as he was being stoned for preaching Christ, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them”?

What is it about Christians that when attacked, something overrides their normal fight or flight response and instead they forgive? Before getting the answer, perhaps you are thinking, “Wait a minute, that doesn’t sound like me at all. When someone is aggressive with me I stick up for myself and don’t think that Christians should lie down like doormats to be trampled.”

If that describes you, then you need to ask yourself these sobering questions: Do you think you are better than others? What good is boasting before God? Are you aware that you sin each and every day and will continue to do so until you die?

To be Christian is to be forgiven. Christ Jesus has suffered for all sin to bring us to His Father. There is no limit to His forgiveness for you. In the same way that God forgives you, you ought to forgive others.

This is how you can have a good conscience before God and when you are called to suffer for being Christian, you can point to Christ as the reason for your confidence and for doing good.

St. Peter wrote that “Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison …” These words of Scripture are the reason for the Apostles’ Creed having the phrase Christ descended into hell.

Why is it that when Christ was raised from the dead by the Holy Spirit, he went first to preach in his body to the spirits in hell? And what did he exactly tell them? His bodily presence was enough to proclaim that he was dead but is now alive and has defeated death and the devil. He holds the keys to Death and Hell. In other words, it all belongs to Him now. Jesus owns both heaven and hell.

That message was not well received by Satan together with all his deceived followers both fallen angels and people. Yet the very same message brings joy and victory to us who are being saved. Why does the same preaching bring death to some and life to others?

God’s Word is no myth. It is fact. Historical fact. The Son of God became man and entered history. He died and rose again. This is true for demons and mankind. But there is a difference. Demons do not believe that Jesus died and rose for them. Christians do.

This is the Holy Spirit’s doing. It is His gift to you to believe this. The only way that any one of us can be convinced that Christ died and rose for me is by the Holy Spirit. That is why the Apostles’ Creed puts the Holy Christian church immediately behind the words “I believe in the Holy Spirit.” Only the Spirit can bring us into the church.

Jesus asked His Father to give us the Holy Spirit, who is called the Spirit of truth. The truth is that Jesus did die and rise for you. The world cannot receive the Holy Spirit because it cannot see him nor knows him. But you know him and He lives with you and is in you.

That changes everything. It changes the way you see yourself, as forgiven and loved by your heavenly Father. It changes the way you see death, as being defeated and nothing to be feared but welcomed because Christ defeated it. It changes the way you react to people who hurt you. You can forgive them as Christ has forgiven you.

Finally, it changes the way you look at God’s commandments. Jesus said: If you love me, you will keep my commandments. We want to keep all of God’s law because we are free to do so. In love we forgive when slandered. By the Holy Spirit living in us, we are convinced that we are never alone, nor left as orphans even after Christ ascended to the right hand of the Father.

So when we say Christ is Risen, it includes the truth that Satan and death are defeated. Because Jesus lives, we live also. God’s Word has set us on the path to life.

Collect: O God, the giver of all that is good, by Your holy inspiration grant that we may think those things that are right and by Your merciful guiding accomplish them; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Hymn of the Day: 556 LSB Ear Christians, One and All, Rejoice