

Sixth Sunday of Easter – 2022

Acts 16:9-15

Revelation 21:9-14, 21-27

John 16:23-33

A young lass in our school said this to her classmate: “I just got stung but I’m not going to tell the teacher because I don’t want the shot.” For those of you who have no idea what any of that means, allow me to set the scene. Both of these girls are 4 years old. The young lass who got stung is allergic to bee stings and so she has an EpiPen stored in our medical cabinet for emergencies. An EpiPen is an auto-injector type of shot that sends a significant dose of epinephrine into one’s system to prevent anaphylactic shock. Anaphylactic shock is a sudden, severe and life-threatening allergic reaction that involves the whole body. The reaction is marked by constriction of the airways, leading to difficulty breathing. The young lass who got stung has had the shot before and it’s no picnic. That’s what she remembers – the pain associated with the EpiPen. She didn’t want to go through that again. As a four-year-old, she doesn’t quite grasp the danger of anaphylactic shock. She doesn’t quite grasp the poison in her system, the allergic reaction, and the danger associated with the sting. She is brave. She can handle the bee sting. Her attitude is one of avoidance, to be sure, but it is also an attitude of soldiering on.

Some people don’t go to the doctor. The twisted progression of thought goes something like this: everyone who goes to the doctor is sick; sick people are the ones who die; I don’t want *to be* sick and so I’ll avoid someone telling me that *I am* sick. It’s a weird logic but it is a logic of sorts – avoidance of reality by avoiding the one who will confirm reality. It’s the doctor who diagnoses the patient. The patient who doesn’t want to be diagnosed is attempting to keep an unhappy reality at bay. That’s how some people see me, how they see pastors, clergymen. Pastors are diagnosticians. When some folks see me, they only see the law, they see their sin and the guy who always seems to point it out. A pastoral visit is going to bring about a pain that I can do without, thank you very much. The most expedient thing to do is to keep that pastor dude away – I can get through the day without hearing the law. It’s one thing for a four-year-old to innocently want to avoid an EpiPen. It’s quite another for a Christian to avoid the pastor, avoid the law, avoid looking at one’s sin.

Little Hailey Joseph told the teacher. She’s a hero. Hailey is the classmate who the girl who got stung told. Hailey promptly told the teacher. The teacher took the young lass to the office. The director held the child and the assistant director administered the EpiPen shot. What was the consequence of all this? Anaphylactic shock was avoided and the young lass is fine. Jesus was in the Upper Room. It is the night of His arrest. He is about to institute the Lord’s Supper. He tells His disciples: “Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me” (Matthew 26:21). Each of them considered the possibility that it might be them. “And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, ‘Is it I, Lord?’” (Matthew 26:22). We fail the Lord. There is no way around it. It hurts. When we know that we have failed the Lord Christ, it hurts. Push it down; that’s what we do; we push it down, into our subconscious, repress it, ignore it, leave it till later. Such a tactic leaves us vulnerable to a sort of spiritual anaphylactic shock; a restricting not of our airways but our “faith-ways,” restricting of our heartbeat of life.

It's time to get one thing in our head: we are amazingly well-loved by the Lord God Almighty. We are loved as we are – sinners. But He will not turn a blind eye to our sin. Love will not do such a thing. Jesus said this: “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:31-32). Jesus said this in response to a bunch of self-righteous types who groused that Jesus had just called Matthew, a tax-collector, to be His disciple. Levi (Matthew) made a great feast at his house for the Lord and the religious stuffed-shirts thought that someone like a tax collector, veritable human waste, would be *beneath* a proper Rabbi. Is that what you think? About anyone? About yourself? Is anyone beneath the Lord Christ and His grace?

He gives the medicine that you need and that medicine is the law. The Law shows you your sin and that hurts. On the night of His arrest, Jesus told His disciples that they would *all* fail Him. “Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone” (John 16:32). “You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered’” (Matthew 26:31). It must’ve hurt to hear. It must’ve hurt when it came true. Why is it, do you suppose, that Christians are gracious to other people? And make no mistake, Christians are exceedingly gracious people. So why is it? Why are Christians gracious to other people? For sure, God is at work in us, to manifest His character, to extend to others the mercy that was first extended to us. Each and every one of you has been restored when you have fallen. By the Lord of the cross, by the pierced Son of God – you have been loved and restored and forgiven and lifted up. The law is not the only medicine that you have received. It is the Gospel that has enlarged your heart. It is the Gospel that snaps your head around and puts your eyes in focus as to who God is and what He has done.

Almighty God, Creator of the depths and the wonder and the brilliance of this universe, this omnipotent Majesty has known you and cared for you. He is your heavenly Father. To save you, to keep you from death, He sent His only-begotten Son into our circumstance. For you, God became man. The humility of God lowering Himself to live our life – being obedient to His Father – that humility is for you. He is happy in your company. He is delighted to serve you. He does not despise us. He never rejects us. He is in solidarity with us. He would stand with you in any situation. He would advocate for you no matter what you should do. His allegiance to you leads Him to take your sin. Taking your sin is something no human being can do – He alone takes it and the divine EpiPen of judgment was rammed into His flesh. It wasn’t epinephrine that coursed through His veins, but our sin and His Father’s wrath. Nails summoned His blood. What poured from His body has enlivened your spirit. You are holy because the Lord Jesus gave Himself into death on the cross and His blood washed you in baptism.

Lydia heard this word. Lydia is the ancient seller of purple goods who lived in the city of Thyatira. Paul was preaching to her, speaking both the law and gospel to this woman. Like you, she needed a Savior. Paul was sent to her, the Gospel came to her because it is not the well who need a physician, but the sick. Like you, Lydia was sick. Like you, “the Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul” (Acts 16:14). She was baptized, she and her household. That’s all we know specifically about Lydia. Do you think that after she became a Christian that her life was easier? Do you suspect that she faced difficulty, challenges, personal pain?

Jesus said something that applies to us all. “I have said these things to you that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). We may have more comforts in this era but tribulation visits us all. Satan, the unbelieving world, and our own sinful flesh have not changed. **We follow the world-redeeming Savior.** He has triumphed over all that. His death and resurrection is a victory of such a magnitude that no difficulty is left unaddressed. Love sets us free. Blood sets us free. Easter sets us free. The Lord Himself ministers to us using the Law and the Gospel. He diagnoses us aright and then administers the medicine of immortality – His body and blood. He calls us each by name and keeps us close. We can look into the mirror of the law and see our sin because we know that Christ has overcome the world, overcome death and the grave and His life courses through our being. We don’t soldier on in this life without Christ. We don’t soldier on without repentance. We confess our sin, we receive His grace, and we follow the Lord into newness of life.