

25 March 2026
Lent 5 Midweek

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Icons of Repentance: Peter - Restoration”

Text: Jeremiah 31:1-6, 10-14; Revelation 21:1-7; John 21:15-19; Psalm 80

In the Name of (+) Jesus. Amen.

I don't know if you heard it or not, but there was an absolutely ridiculous phrase in the readings we heard tonight. A phrase that makes no sense at all, and is not just complete un-reality, but about as far from reality as it is possible to get! Did you hear it? ***O virgin Israel!***

Do you know how unfaithful, how absurdly adulterous, Israel was to God? How far from a virgin she was? When you get home tonight, read Jeremiah chapters two and three, and this is what you'll hear . . .

That no other nation changes its gods; only Israel. She welcomes them all, takes them all in. One after the other. The gods of the Egyptians, the gods of the Canaanites, the gods of the Syrians and the Assyrians. In fact, Jeremiah says so picturesquely, Israel is like a she-camel in heat, putting her nose in the air, sniffing for suitors, and turning no false god down. She sits by the side of the road and welcomes all comers. There is no green tree in all of creation under which she is not willing to have a false god. She puts all the other nations to shame. And it's not even close. Israel is not only wicked, she could *teach* wickedness. And she is so wicked and spiritually adulterous, that she puts Egypt and Assyria to shame! And there's *more*, but I'll stop there.

Jeremiah is devastating in his preaching, his accusations, laying Israel low. And yet we heard tonight - from the very same prophet! from Jeremiah! - a few chapters later, ***O virgin Israel.***

That, really, tells you all you need to know about forgiveness. What forgiveness is, and how powerful it is. That when you are ransomed and redeemed by the Lord, when the blood of Jesus washes away your sin, your cleansing, your restoration, is so full and complete that you are not just restored, but renewed. Re-newed. Made new again. *Really* new. 100% pristine, sinless, and perfect in the eyes of God.

Which sounds too good to be true. *Way too good.* But that's what God's Word says. That's how great Jesus' atonement is. And it is *for you*. And once you know that, why

wouldn't you repent?

This is what we heard in **the reading from Revelation** tonight as well. New. New heavens. New earth. New Jerusalem. The ***new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband***. And do you remember how St. Paul described the Church in the same way? That

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, - and here it is - without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish (Ephesians 5:25-27).

And then - now back in the reading from Revelation - Jesus says: ***Behold, I am making all things new***. And that *all* includes YOU. You sanctified, you cleansed, by the washing of water with the word - Holy Baptism. You redeemed, you restored, you made new. Whatever your sins, they are no more. *You* may remember them, but God does not. And so because of Jesus, Jeremiah can say that Israel will be a virgin again.

As is Peter. He is our fifth and final *Icon of Repentance*. It may seem strange, lumping Peter together with adulterous Israel - surely, he wasn't *that* bad! And maybe you think you're not as bad as Israel. I mean . . . that description by Jeremiah . . . *that's pretty out there!*

But adultery is adultery, and adultery is a First Commandment thing. And you're either faithful, or you're not. It's not just taking up with the false gods of the Egyptians, the Canaanites, the Syrians and Assyrians. Our false gods are all the people and things in this world we fear, love, and trust more than our heavenly Father. All the people and things in this world we look to for our good, our security, our comfort, our approval, our contentment, our life. To give us what we think we want, to take us where we want to go. The latest thing we chase that the world says is the end-all, be-all, cure-all. Our false gods are whatever takes our hearts and minds off of God and leads us into sin.

For Peter, it was fear. Fear of being found out as a disciple of Jesus. Fear of even being identified as being from the same place as Jesus - from Galilee! So he trusted his lies and denials, denying even knowing who this Jesus fella was three times. *Who? Never heard of Him. Never laid eyes on Him before tonight. Don't know who you're talking about.* And after it was all done and the rooster crowed, he went out and wept bitterly. What hope did he have now? Maybe he remembered what Jesus had said before: *Whoever would save his life will lose it . . .* (Matthew 16:25). Well, he lost it. He never got a chance to say I repent, or I confess, or even I'm sorry, (at least, not

that are recorded in the Bible). But though those words may not have come out of his mouth, they came out of his eyes.

But in the reading from John we heard tonight, the resurrected Jesus restored him. Three times he denied, so three times Jesus graciously gives him the opportunity to *confess* his faith and *profess* his love. This didn't earn him his forgiveness. Jesus had already done that on the cross. But it was part of his *restoration*. He was already restored and new in the eyes of God, but not in his own eyes. He needs to see, he needs to hear, what Jesus has done for him. And he hears it not just from his own mouth, his own confession and profession, he hears it also from Jesus, who entrusts to *him* the care of His own lambs and sheep!

Why would you do that, Jesus? Give this important task and responsibility to such a one as Peter? A fearful denier? A sinful man? Unless . . . unless that was all gone now. Unless that had all been taken away. Unless Peter had been *made new*. Which is exactly what Jesus had done.

And it is what He has done for you. As St. Paul told the Corinthians: *If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old - or the old you - has passed away; behold, the new - a new you! - has come* (2 Corinthians 5:17). And you are in Christ Jesus. So you are new. Not good as new, but really, truly new. Holy and without blemish. **Virgin Israel.**

And how appropriate is that title and that teaching this night, for today is March 25th. March 25th is exactly nine months before December 25th, which, you know what that is. So March 25th is the day the Church commemorates the Annunciation of our Lord. The day when the angel Gabriel came to the *virgin*, Mary, and told her she would be the mother of God. And by the Spirit, working through the Word, the Son of God was made flesh, conceived in her womb. **And so the one born from a virgin of Israel is the one who will make Israel virgin again.**

And this is what we prayed for in the Psalm tonight as well. Three times in this Psalm we sang: ***Restore us, O God of hosts, let your face shine, that we may be saved.*** And the word there for *restore* in the Hebrew is to *return* or *turn back*. Return us to the way we were, without sin. Turn back the clock to the Garden, before sin. **Which is exactly what Jesus has done for us.**

Now we'll go back to St. Paul again and what he told the Corinthians. Notice how he says that what we prayed for in the psalm has been done for us in Jesus. *For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.* That is to say, **the light and glory of God shine forth for us in the face of Jesus.** The one who makes *all*

things new. And so you are. ***It is done***, Jesus said in Revelation. *It is finished*, Jesus said on the cross.

Which is a fitting conclusion to our *Icons of Repentance* and the journey we have taken this Lent. From the no excuses tax collector, to the no-more-covering-up David, to the Lost Son and the Father's love, to the forgiven woman and the fruit of repentance, to Peter and the restoration of repentance. This is what our heavenly Father desires and what His Son has come to accomplish, and what we will remember once again all next week. Holy Week. Restoration week. The week that makes us *new* again. Not good as new - for Jesus does nothing *good as* or *good enough*. New. Really new. 100% pristine, sinless, and perfect in the eyes of God. To live new. A new life. An above-and-beyond sin life. That is who you are. Now. In Jesus.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.