

14 April 2024  
Easter 3

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“Two Months”

Text: Luke 24:36-49; Acts 3:11-21; 1 John 3:1-7

Alleluia! Christ is risen! **[He is risen indeed! Alleluia!]** Alleluia!

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

A lot can change in two months.

First of all, exactly two months ago we were gathered here in this place. The paraments were black, our hearts were solemn, and our voices cried out in repentance. It was February 14th, and Ash Wednesday. But now the paraments are white, our hearts are filled with joy, and our voices cry out *alleluia!* A lot has changed in two months.

Second, last week in the Introit, we prayed: *Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation* (1 Peter 2:2). And for newborn infants, a lot changes in two months as they get used to life outside the womb and grow so fast.

And third, in the readings we heard today from the books of Luke and Acts, approximately two months have gone by.

In the reading from Luke it was Easter evening, the disciples were afraid and hiding, and their hearts were troubled and doubting. And their minds? Well, they didn't know what to think. They knew what Jesus had told them, but they also knew what they saw with the horrible cross and the large stone that sealed shut Jesus' tomb. And what they *now* saw they weren't sure was real! For when they saw Jesus, ***they thought they saw a spirit***, a ghost.

But in the reading from Acts, approximately two months later, how different the disciples are! How much they have grown! From their newborn faith of Easter evening, to now boldly and confidently proclaiming - to those who just two months before had been yelling for Jesus' crucifixion! - saying ***you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead***. The disciples are no longer afraid and hiding, and their hearts are no longer troubled and doubting. They are all grown up. A lot changed in two months.

But what changed? What caused this change in the disciples? Was it seeing the risen

Jesus? Hearing Him speak, seeing Him eat, and touching His flesh and bones? Certainly that was part of it. Was it receiving the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost? That happened just before the reading we heard today in Acts. And surely that was part of it as well. But *the pure spiritual milk* that caused them to *grow up* - to grow up to be Jesus' apostles, and to grow up to salvation - was ***the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms***. That is, the Scriptures. The Bible. The Word of God.

For that first Easter night, Jesus didn't just appear to His disciples and show Himself to them as risen from the dead. That was great, but not enough. For even after seeing Him, hearing Him, and touching Him, Luke tells us ***they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling***. Or in other words, *it was too good to be true*. And so when weeks, months, or years went by, and when the heat of persecution was turned up high, when their brother apostles started being martyred, when they weren't sure what new struggle, hardship, or attack tomorrow would bring, you can imagine them thinking back to this night and sadly thinking: yup, *it really was too good to be true*. For look at what's happening! Victory? Nah. We just saw and believed what we wanted to see and believe.

So after appearing to His disciples and showing Himself to them as risen from the dead, **Jesus feeds them**. He gives them that *pure spiritual milk* they need to grow up. ***He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures***. He showed them that what had happened was no surprise, no accident. He showed them how Moses, Joshua, David, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Jeremiah - *all* the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms - had laid this all out. Hundreds and thousands of years before it happened, it had all be spoken. This was the promise. This was the plan. ***That the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and then, that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem***. Jesus had fulfilled all the first, and now they would fulfill all the second. **He** died and rose from the dead, and now **they** would be the preachers, the proclaimers, for they were the eyewitnesses. And they would start in the very place it all happened, and to the very people who had crucified Him - ***beginning in Jerusalem***.

And just approximately two months later, there they were, the disciples now apostles, in Jerusalem, at the Temple, healing a man who had been lame from birth, and proclaiming Jesus. Oh, how much had changed in two months!

**And now it is us**. But how much has, how much *can* change for you in a mere sixty days? For the verse I mentioned before, about being *like newborn infants* . . . for newborn infants, sixty days is a long time! When you're only sixty days old, sixty days is a doubling, a 100% increase in your life! So of course a lot will change. But when you're, say, sixty years old, or 21,915 days old, another 60 days is only a one-fifth of one percent increase in your life. And surely, the other 99.997% of your life defines you and has shaped you a lot more. So two months? Not that big a deal. Right?

**Except it was for the disciples.** Maybe they weren't sixty years old, but they weren't sixty days either. But no matter how old you are, how would not just sixty days, but sixty days *filled with the Word of God* change you? Sixty days filled with Moses, Joshua, David, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Jeremiah, and more. Sixty days filled with what God had promised, what God had done, and what God had fulfilled for you. Sixty days not watching TikTok, not scrolling through Instagram or SnapChat, not reading X or Facebook posts, not conversing on Discord, or binge watching that show. Sixty days of not filling your minds with the thoughts and opinions of the world, but having your mind opened and filled with the Word of God. Do you think those sixty days could, would, change a lot?

What if we were *like newborn infants, longing for that pure spiritual milk?* Longing for the Word of God? And so not just growing up, but *growing up to salvation?*

Well that is, in fact, how we should think of ourselves. That's how the apostle John put it today, telling us: ***See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.*** Now, who was John talking to? How old were the people He was writing to? No doubt of all ages. Some young, some old. *But all children.* Children of God. And if the age gap between a sixty day old infant and a sixty year old adult is great, how great is the age gap between us, however old you are, and the God of eternity? So newborn infants? That really *is* who we are to our heavenly Father. And what we need to be fed is *the pure spiritual milk* of God's Word.

And fed with the Word of God, we are who we are, and we grow up to salvation. **The Word of God makes all the difference.** It is by water and the Word that we are born from above as children of God. It is by the Word of God that we are fed the Body and Blood of Jesus in bread and wine. It is by the Word of God that our sins are forgiven, our hearts cleansed, and our consciences put at ease. It is the Word of God that has brought all of us here today and the Word of God that teaches us and trains us in righteousness. It is the Word of God that reveals to us what we could not otherwise know - that we have a loving heavenly Father, a Son who laid down His life for us and took it up again, and the Spirit given to us and giving us life. This pure spiritual milk, this Word of God, calls us, makes us, keeps us, and sustains us as children of God.

***And that is who you are,*** John says. Not who you *may* be or *should* be, but are. That's a statement of fact. Now, you may not look like it or act like it or be very good at it, that may all be true! And if being a child of God were up to you, maybe that would disqualify you. But if God begets His children through water and the Word (and He does!), and if God feeds His children with the very Body and Blood of His Son in this bread and wine (and He does!), and if God forgives His children with His Absolution (which He does!), and if God gives you His Spirit (which He does!), **then who you are is up to Him.** You are who He says you are, what His Word says you are. His living, active, and powerful Word, which does what it says, from the Word spoken in the first days of creation to the

Word spoken here at Font, Pulpit, and Altar. Children don't decide to be born, they are born. Of a father and a mother. And so have you been born, both physically and spiritually.

The only way that ends is if you cut yourself off from the source of your life - cut yourself off from *the pure spiritual milk* of the Word of God. But with the Word of God there is life, there is growth, there is peace and hope and righteousness. And you are like that newborn infant, growing and maturing unto salvation. Growing and maturing, but never ceasing to be children. Children of your heavenly Father.

And so no matter how old you are, how much life is behind you or how much life is ahead of you, as children, **a lot can change in sixty days**. In fact, with the Word of God, a lot can change *in an instant!* The instant the baptismal water is poured on you. The instant the Body and Blood of Jesus are fed to you. The instant the Absolution is pronounced to you. For the Lord doesn't need sixty days - six hours on the cross and three days in the tomb was enough! Enough to change everything for you.

So in a world where we are being told to "grow up!" and to "act your age!", and where children are growing up faster than ever, maybe it's better not to! Maybe it's better to stay children. Children of God. Children looking to our Father for all we need. Or even more, to be like those *newborn infants, longing for pure spiritual milk*. Safe and secure in the arms of God. Growing but never grown. Maturing but never independent. Growing but always children. Until ***He appears, and, John says, we see Him as He is***. As He appeared to His disciples that first Easter evening, and as He will appear to us on the final Easter, when not He but we rise from the grave, to that life that has no end.

So on this sixtieth day after Ash Wednesday, a lot has changed! Our mourning has turned into dancing and our sackcloth and ashes into gladness and joy. Because Christ is risen! **[He is risen indeed! Alleluia!]** Alleluia!

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.  
Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.