

3rd Sunday of Easter – B
LSB #906
Text – Acts 3:20

...that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, & that He may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus...

THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD

“Explore these places you never thought you could afford.” “Jazz Fest flaunts its Louisiana roots as good times roll on in.” Both were headlines at the USA Today website this past week. In the 1st ad, you can get a free train ride in Alaska if you turn 50 this year. In the 2nd, it states, “The healing power of music is bringing people back...” to New Orleans.

The vacation industry & tourism in general have exploded in our country the past 30 years. They’ve taken a hit with the collapsing economy but that perfect romantic getaway is still in the dreams of many people. Whether it’s computer games or jazz, a trip to Alaska or gardening, people are looking for times of refreshing. You & I long for them as well.

The Word of God from the Book of Acts makes very clear where those times of refreshing come from, “...that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord...” But as long our lives are coasting along in relative ease, we diligently try to find those times of refreshing everywhere else, but in the Lord. It’s a reflex of our sinful nature to do so.

We read books, but not those with the Word of God in them. We watch television & movies but how many of them are focused on the presence of the Lord? We take vacations for times of refreshing & if they occur over a Sunday how often have we bothered to find a church to attend that morning?

Something happens that causes you disappointment, frustration & anger. It's a perfect opportunity to seek a time of refreshing from the Lord, but haven't there been times when you found yourself lashing out at someone instead? They had nothing to do with your problems, but they happened to be in the wrong place, at the wrong time, so you vented on them. Now you have even more reason to feel disappointed, frustrated & angry, as this new sin of yours gnaws away at your soul. You feel hollow & empty inside – devoid of life. However powerful & real those feelings may be, they're simply a lie, if you are a child of God.

Feelings do not create reality. They're merely a response to something we perceive as reality. Feelings do not have, & they do not create substance. Yet they are ever so dangerous because Satan is able to use them like a master illusionist. For our feelings to be God pleasing they must always be grounded in Jesus Christ:

“...that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, & that He may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus...” The Gospel of John states, “...but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, & that by believing you may have life in His name.”

Yet, in the Gospel reading for today, as Jesus himself stood among His disciples, “...they were startled & frightened & thought they saw a spirit.” The presence of the Lord brought them peace, but it also brings fear. Our sinful nature is afraid of God. Our saintly nature finds peace only in Him. We may think of it as a catch 22.

The key, to which emotion dominates your thoughts, is explained in the verse immediately before the sermon text, “Repent therefore, & turn again, that your sins may be blotted out...” The prophet Isaiah experienced it this way:

“And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, & the house was filled with smoke. And I said: ‘Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, & I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!’ Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth & said: ‘Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, & your sin atoned for.’”

Isaiah was afraid, but he didn't run away. He confessed his sin & it was forgiven. His guilt was taken away. That left him at peace with His heavenly Father. We too need to get past our fears, & not run away. Jesus still frightens us today. We're afraid to confess our sins because of what the devil's lies say will result from it.

We let our sinful feelings override faith in Jesus. We don't trust or believe the words & promises of God, because we want to follow our heart. We have some fancy idea of what 'times of refreshment' should mean, but those dreams are entirely bound to the things of this earth. We forget that we are but strangers here & heaven is already today our home.

We stubbornly resist confessing our sins because it'll hurt our pride & reputation. The devil tells us it's not convenient to repent just now. It can wait until tomorrow. Then tomorrow never comes. Our sins begin to pile up. Our saintly nature begins to suffocate. Our prayer life begins to fade. Our Christian friends annoy us more & more. Slowly we drift away from God.

If only God would show me a sign. If only I'd see a miracle. If only Jesus would come to me. Yet He's there, & He's here, all the time. We don't see because we

choose not to. We don't hear because we stop listening. We don't feel His presence because we've rejected repenting of our sins.

All of us are looking for something out of the dull routine. All of us are longing for refreshment. The Word of God gives the answer but we don't see it, or hear it, or believe it, because we've stopped making use of it:

“Repent therefore, & turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, & that He may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus...” Times of refreshing will not come if we've turned away from repenting. Our sins are already forgiven, but for many different reasons we stop coming to the banquet. We forget that the end times are already here. We grow complacent because our Lord is patient. Yet as we hope in Christ for the forgiveness of our sins, we are made clean.

Jesus' presence at Holy Communion is not easily discerned with our physical senses. Our spiritual senses are most often too dull to notice. However, they become more sensitive when we're hurting, so our Father in heaven uses the means we give Him, to draw us back to Himself. The time of refreshing is here, if you will only believe.
Amen.

This day God's people meeting, His holy Scripture hear; His living presence greeting, through bread & wine made near. We journey on believing, renewed with heavenly might, from grace more grace receiving, on this blest day of light. Amen.