

St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, 859 5th St., Hancock, MN 56244

www.hancocklutheran.org

Pastor Gregg Bitter (320) 392-5313 - GreggBitter@gmail.com

Easter 3

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## **What a Metamorphosis the Easter Message Works! Acts 2:36-47**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Amen. The word from God before us today through which the Holy Spirit testifies about Jesus is Acts 2:

*“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”*

*When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”*

*Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”*

*... Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.*

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.(Acts 2:36-47 excerpts NIV11)*

This is the word of our Lord.

Dear friends in Christ, fellow saints washed clean in the blood of our risen Savior:

The hard chrysalis began to crack and split apart. Soon a Monarch butterfly emerged, spreading its wings for the first time. That lowly, worm-like caterpillar had become a beautiful butterfly. What a change! What a transformation! What a metamorphosis!

The butterfly is used as a symbol for Easter and the resurrection. Remember in Psalm 22 how Jesus called out: “But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people” (Psalm 22:6 NIV84)? He lowered himself, covered by our sins, more disgusting than any kind of worm or caterpillar. Like the chrysalis, he lay dead in the tomb and then emerged as the mighty Monarch and conquering King.

The butterfly symbolizes for us, dear Christians, our own resurrection. After this lowly, earthly existence, our bodies will lie dead. But Jesus will raise us in glory when he returns on the Last Day, and we will reign with him forever and ever. What a

metamorphosis!

But the butterfly reminds us not only of our physical resurrection yet to come but also of our spiritual resurrection, our first resurrection, which has already happened. For you, dear Christian, have already been raised with Christ. The Second Lesson on Easter from Colossians proclaimed that Good News to us. Through baptism you were buried with Christ and have been raised with him to live a new life before God. What a change! What a transformation! What a metamorphosis the Easter message works! It changes our hearts, and it changes our lives.

### **A. It changes our hearts**

What a metamorphosis the Easter message works! It changes our hearts, just as it changed the hearts of those in Jerusalem who heard Peter's Pentecost sermon recorded in Acts 2.

Last week you heard an earlier part of that sermon. Peter proclaimed the risen Jesus. Yes, Jesus of Nazareth, had done miracles showing that he was from God, but the people had handed him over to death. Yet this was in accord with God's set purpose and plan. For God raised him from the dead, just as the Scriptures had foretold in Psalm 16. In fact, God exalted Jesus to his right hand with dominion and power over all, as Psalm 110 foretold. Jesus had risen indeed! Peter draws this all together in the text today as he concludes his Pentecost sermon: "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah" (Acts 2:36 NIV11).

They had crucified the Messiah. How that cut them to the heart! How could such a sin be forgiven? Such a crime! They were surely the scum of the earth, lower than any worm or caterpillar. What hope was left? Despairing of their own work or effort, they turn to the apostles.

What answer do they receive? Is there any hope? Peter responded, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:38, 39 NIV11).

Do you see how repentance is not just remorse? They were already remorseful over their sin, cut to the heart. Repentance not only feels sorry; it turns to Jesus. Repentance trusts Jesus alone for unconditional forgiveness, full and free. Repentance believes God's promise. Yes, they had crucified the Messiah. Their guilt was clear; no argument there. But the Messiah had died for their sins too, even that sin. His resurrection proves it. God raised Jesus from the dead because in Jesus even they had forgiveness.

This is the forgiveness baptism brings. For through the water and word of Baptism God pours out the Holy Spirit. What a gift the Spirit is! He changes the heart. He ignites and kindles faith. He drives out the darkness of unbelief with the light of Jesus Christ. He raises the heart, which was dead in sin, and makes it alive before God. What a metamorphosis the Easter message works!

Do I stand truly astounded at such metamorphosis, or do I take it for granted? What about you? It's not just something that happened back then for those people. It's happened for us. In fact, it's happened in you and me at Baptism. For we are as sinful as

those people. “But I didn’t shout, ‘Crucify him!’ I didn’t pound those nail! I wasn’t there.” But whose sins brought all that suffering, all that hellish punishment, on Jesus, so that the Father withdrew his love, forsaking his Son? Maybe are guilt is even greater. We have the full Scriptures, so shouldn’t we know better? And yet we sin. How Peter’s accusation cuts deep into our hearts: “this Jesus, whom you crucified!”

But don’t despair. Believe Peter’s words, “This promise is for you and your children” (Acts 2:39 NIV11). And that doesn’t just mean those first hearers back in Jerusalem, for he adds, “... and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:39 NIV11). That’s you, dear friend, and me.

At your Baptism all your sins, even your future sins, were washed away. You are forgiven. That’s God’s promise. In Baptism the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, placed their name on you, as your head felt the drops of water. Believe his promise, for he has signed it. Through Baptism God gave you the Holy Spirit. The Spirit made your heart alive. He raised you with Christ. He is powerful at work in you.

What a change in our hearts because Jesus rose from the dead! What a metamorphosis the Easter message works!

This change of heart shows itself by changing the way we live.

## **B. It changes our lives**

The Easter message changed the lives of those who heard it on that Pentecost Sunday long ago. The text tells us how the first Christian shared everything in common. When there was need, those who had property or possessions would sell some in order to help their fellow believers. What a wonderful display of Christian faith, love, and hope!

This change of life wasn’t forced from the outside but flowed from their hearts in praise to God. Outward threats or promises can be used in ways to coerce or entice Christian-looking behavior, just as you can force open a chrysalis and try to find something that looks like a butterfly. But it’s dead. People can be forced to act like a Christian, but that does not make their heart alive. That’s not what we see here.

Rather their kindness and generosity flowed from faith, love, and hope. Their faith believed that all was right between them and God because Jesus had risen taking away their sins. Their faith trusted their heavenly Father to provide for them so that they could be generous toward others. Their love for those in need burned brightly because they experienced God’s great love that gave his Son up for them. And their hope anticipated the heavenly inheritance that never perishes, spoils, or fades. So they did not cling to their earthly stuff, which soon decays, or the fading pleasures it brings. What a change in life! What a metamorphosis the Easter message had worked in them!

When the Easter message changes our hearts, it changes our lives as well. An unchanged life reveals and unchanged heart, a heart still dead in sin. Now a part of you and me, dear Christian, does remain unchanged. That’s the old self. Our old self makes changing our lives feel burdensome if not impossible. Our old self must be forced, coerced, beaten, and drowned day after day. We can’t turn our old self into a Christian. It will never be converted and it will never completely die in this life. So we keep on fighting against it. We struggle on to keep it from interfering with the good that we want to do as God’s people. We beat and drown it again and again so that it does not choke out

our new life and smother our faith.

Where do we find the strength to combat our old self and drown it daily? How does our new self daily arise and live before God in righteousness and purity? What did the first Christians do? The text says, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42 NIV11).

Devote yourself, dear Christian friend, to the apostles' teaching, that is, to the Holy Scriptures, which the Lord himself gave the prophets and apostles to write for us. Gather with your fellow believers around that word to gladly hear and learn it, united in heart and mind. What fellowship that is! Devote yourself to that one-of-a-kind breaking of bread, the Lord's Supper. Christ's body and blood bring you forgiveness. Receive his Supper with a heart of prayer, confessing your sin and trusting your risen Savior's promise. Yes, his word and sacraments change our lives from the inside out.

The Lord took me just as I am, and he changed me. He changes my heart, and he changes my life. And he does the same for you. He takes us worm-like sinners and transforms us. Don't cling to the old. Rather press on as you devote your heart to his word and sacraments and busy yourself with them. For they transform our hearts and lives. Remember the butterfly. What a metamorphosis the Easter message works! Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.