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Our Saviour Lutheran Church  
Easter 3

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the mediations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

So, sisters and brothers in Christ, have you gotten your vaccination card?

You know, the card that verifies that you have been immunized.

The card that says you have received your vaccine.

The card that proves you are good-to-go.

The card is like the slogan of that credit card VISA, "Everywhere you want to be."

PAUSE

The vaccination card has become the all-important document, hasn't it?

So much so, some people are laminating their card, so that the card is better protected from wear and tear.

And some people are keeping their card in their fireproof safe at home with all their other important papers.

And because it is such an important document there are scammers out there trying to sell fake vaccination cards for hundreds of dollars.

Yes, the vaccination card has become the all-important document.

Why? Because we may have to present our card in order to do the things we want to do.

Because we may have to show our card to go to those places where we want to do.

College students may have to present their card before returning to school.

Travelers may have to present their card before boarding an airplane.

So on and so forth.

In essence, the vaccination card may in fact become our ticket to re-entering life.

If you want to go here or go there...

If you want to do this or do that...

If you want to partake of life, you had better have your vaccination card at-the-ready.

It is your ticket to life.

PAUSE

Now, who knows? It may not come to all of that.

After all, there are concerns about privacy issues.

There are concerns surrounding the HIPAA law.

So the need to present your vaccination may fall to the wayside.

Nonetheless, I can't help but be amazed at the sudden importance our society has placed in a single little piece of paper.

It has become really our ticket to life.

PAUSE

Now, thank goodness, God, doesn't work this way, right?

Thank goodness, God, doesn't require papers and cards from us so as to make sure we are good-to-go.

Thank goodness, God does not demand documentation from us.

Come the time we arrive at the Pearly Gates, St. Peter isn't going to be stopping us at the point of entry, asking for our baptismal certificate before allowing us to step into Paradise.

What a fiasco that would be!

Can you just see it now?

Some unknowing saint walks up to the gate, and St. Peter asks to see their birth certificate.

"Oh no, St. Peter I left my baptismal certificate in my fireproof safe at home. It's with my vaccination card and other important documents."

"I even had my baptismal certificate laminated, so it wouldn't get destroyed. I know exactly where it is. Can I go get it?"

"Too bad," says St. Peter. "But I can't allow you to enter. Rules are rules after all."

What a fiasco!

PAUSE

No, St. Peter is not waiting at the Pearly Gates checking to see if you have your baptismal certificate in hand.

St. Peter is not waiting at the door of heaven, checking our paperwork, why?, because God's ticket to life is not contained on paper.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the ticket to life is not a laminated vaccination card, although it may feel like that right now.

Nor is the ticket to life our baptismal certificate.

PAUSE

No, it is what lies behind these things that gives life.

It is what lies behind these symbols that gives life.

What I mean to say by that is that the vaccination is that which immunizes us from the Covid-19 virus.

The card is just the symbol.

And the baptismal certificate does not make one good-with-God, so that we can enter heaven.

It is the fact that Jesus has died for our sins and has been raised to new life that indeed promises us the hope of salvation.

The baptismal certificate, the ritual baptism itself, is just a sign of what God has already accomplished in Christ on the cross.

PAUSE

And today's gospel reading all the more hammers home this point—that it is what is behind the sign that is what is important.

The gospel reading today is about signs and the meaning behind them.

For instance, notice that the disciples are gathered together after Jesus is raised, and Jesus appears to them and he shows them his hands and feet.

Why? Why does Jesus do that? Is Jesus surrendering, "I give up"?

No, Jesus shows his disciples his hands and feet because they still bare the wounds of the cross.

In other words, Jesus is showing them that it is truly him standing before them.

The wounds on his hands and feet are the signs of who he is, the crucified Lord.

And then Jesus asks to have something to eat.

Why? Was Jesus satisfying his hunger?

Maybe Jesus is famished having been dead for three days.

More likely, Jesus asks for something to eat because he wants to show the disciples that he is not a ghost.

A ghost has no need for food.

The act of eating food is a sign that Jesus is truly resurrected in bodily form.

PAUSE

Jesus performs these actions—showing his wounds, eating fish...

Jesus performs these actions, as signs of new life, of resurrected life, of bodily resurrected life.

Jesus then is presenting himself as the ticket of life.

Life is not a card or piece of paper, it is not baptismal certificate.

Life is a person. And in Christ, in the person of Jesus we have life.

It is in Christ that we move, and live, and have our being.

PAUSE

And this is something utterly profound.

And it is something I have been thinking a lot about lately.

Jesus is the ticket to new life, but new life for the Christian means being in Christ.

And it is actually something apostle Paul thought a lot about, and wrote a lot about.

PAUSE

In his letters, the apostle Paul used this phrase “in Christ,” frequently.

But what does it mean to be “in Christ”?

We often think of the phrase “in Christ” to mean that we believe in Christ.

We other think of the phrase “in Christ” as a reference point for our faith.

Who it is we referring to when we say, “We believe.”

We believe in Jesus.

But, Paul had something more profound in mind with respect to the Christian life.

Paul actually believed that the Christian life is lived inside the person of Christ.

So to say that “we believe in Christ” is more than a reference point of our faith.

To say that “we believe in Christ” is meant to mean that we have been situated, positioned, placed inside the realm of Christ.

Indeed, Luther talked of the Christian’s reality as though a person lives outside their own person and inside the person of Christ.

The Christian lives outside their own self and in the person Jesus Christ.

This is why Paul then speaks of putting on Christ, like so many articles of clothing.

We live in Christ, like we live in the clothes we would don for the day.

Only we don’t take off Christ at the end of the day and put Christ in the hamper.

No, we wear Christ, we exist in Christ, the whole of our Christian lives.

Whether awake or asleep, whether at work, or at school, or at play, whether home or away, we are in Christ.

PAUSE

This is also why Paul then speaks of the church as the body of Christ.

As a community of believers we have our existence together in Christ.

But Christianity is not like some club we join, or organization we belong to.

Christianity is not about being part of an organization or club whereby we attend meetings, pay dues, and so on, such that we are then in good standing with the group of people that makes up an organization or club.

No, Christianity is not an organization or club we belong to as part of our lives.

No, Christianity is the whole of lives, because as Christians our whole life is in Christ.

Our Christian faith is not one facet or part of our lives.

Instead, our whole lives are part of the body of Christ.

And Christianity then is not an individualistic experience.

Being a Christian means being connected to one another as the body of Christ.

And I find it most appropriate that the word “members” has a dual meaning.

We speak of members of a church, like members of an organization.

But we also speak of members that comprise a body, like an arm or leg, just as we are members of Christ’s body.

And this...this is what makes Christianity such a very strange belief system.

Christianity really isn’t about the truth contained in Christian doctrines and teachings.

For Christianity, truth is a person, Jesus Christ. And to subscribe to the Christian faith is to be in Christ.

I know of other belief system that defines itself in just this way.

PAUSE

Sisters and brothers in Christ, the ticket to life then is not some card, or certificate, or other piece of documentation.

The ticket to life is Jesus. He alone is the truth.

And as members of this truth, as persons who are in Christ, we are called to be witnesses to Christ.

Because if we understand ourselves as being in Christ, it is no longer you and I that live, but Christ who lives in us.

By being in Christ, our lives then become so conformed to Christ that our life is a witness to Christ.

We become signs ourselves of the glory of Christ Jesus of Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen.