

April 14, 2024 (Easter 3 B)

Acts 3:17-20

“The EASTER Season”

Earlier this week as I began working on this sermon, I took the dog out and freezing cold rain was coming at me sideways – my umbrella wasn’t doing much good and almost flew away on me. I was thinking, “*Boy – this feels a lot more like spring in Eastern Canada than it does like spring in Eastern Texas.*” We have 4 seasons down here too, but they’re quite different. I was in the Caribbean years ago chatting with a local who said the average temperature in summer was 81 and the average temperature in winter was 80. So, I asked, “*Is there basically only 1 season down here?*” No, he replied, we have the rainy season and the dry season. The seasons can be radically different depending upon where you live.

Here in the church we have different seasons too, but they’re consistent no matter where you live – we’ve turned the page a few weeks back and begun a whole *new season* of the church year: **EASTER!** The darkness of Lent / the sparse altar / the purple and black / the depressing hymns . . . have all been replaced with JOY / light / flowers / life / alleluias – and hymns of rejoicing, for Easter is here!

In this beautiful season of the church year, we see how Easter transformed the **apostles**. In the power of the Holy Spirit they healed people (as we see here in Acts 3). They preached boldly in the Temple courts in front of everyone – and probably didn’t even bother locking their doors anymore. They had courage / strength / confidence / power / hope / purpose and DRIVE . . . and the gates of hell could not stand against them, for not even death could scare these men off now! That’s what we see in “*The Easter Season*” – and we get a glimpse of it here in our text: **Acts 3:17–20** (NIV 11)

17 “Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. 18 But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. 19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, 20 and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus.”

These verses bring out 4 key truths that we find in the Easter Season:

1. **Repentance.** And – you might be saying to yourself, “*I thought that was the **Lenten season** – it was all about repentance!” Yes, but in the Easter season it has a slightly different emphasis, and a more positive twist to it. Repentance is something wonderful you get to do, by the Spirit’s power and with His help. Peter had the freedom to leave his denial of Jesus in the past. He turned away from that shame and went in a new direction. Even those who **KILLED** Jesus had this glorious opportunity: to leave that horrible chapter behind and turn a new page here. And – to all those who took their Lord up on His gracious call to repent, they would receive:*
2. **Forgiveness.** Your sins are **WIPED OUT**. *Even if you called down curses on yourself in denying Jesus? Yes. Even if you had been shouting **CRUCIFY** on Good Friday and participating in the murder of God’s One and Only Son? Yes.* Easter grace, mercy, and forgiveness is even that powerful! Following on the heels of that you get:
3. **Times of refreshing!** That word for “refreshing” means: “A state of cheer and encouragement after troubling and upsetting times / a breath of fresh air / new life – like spring temperatures after a long, cold, and hard winter / relaxation and relief” – all brought to you by the powerful Gospel; rooted in the miracle of Easter. Those who participated in the crucifixion of our Lord were offered a place in His own family, and the start of a new chapter that ends there in glory. That’s amazing grace, and it reminds me of what Jesus said in **Matthew 11:28** “*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*” And that brings us to the last key truth here:
4. **God will send Jesus, the Messiah, to you.** As Jesus said to His people at His Ascension: “*And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*” That means we have His Almighty **PEACE** – and His Almighty Presence, bring us all the strength, courage, and power we need to face anything – *even death* – for He has already destroyed death by His resurrection on Easter Sunday.

By the way, this *Easter Season* wasn’t opened for the first time there on the Day of His resurrection. It has always been there because God **PROMISED** it – meaning people in Old Testament times could enjoy this season too. **Isaiah** spoke about it 700 years ahead of time: “*On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death*

forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken. In that day they will say, 'Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the LORD, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.'" Isaiah 25:7-9.

Remember how **Nathan the prophet** opened up this season for **King David**, who was crushed in guilt after committing adultery and murder? (2 Samuel 12) David spoke about these same Easter truths here in **Psalm 32:3-7** *"When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD'— and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him. You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance."* Even through the darkness of LENT, every Sunday was still a little Easter oasis – where we saw a glimpse of what we find in this glorious **Easter season**.

But . . . if the Easter season is always there in God's Word, just begging for us to enjoy and experience it . . . *then why do we avoid it?* And – I don't just mean the people that avoid church altogether and avoid reading and studying God's Word – even us, the small band of faithful people who show up every Sunday . . . avoid this glorious **Easter chapter** too.

For some sick reason, we are more comfortable sitting in the darkness than we are basking in the LIGHT! We can let guilt eat us alive, even though we've been forgiven – we just don't want to forgive ourselves and start a new and different season. We'll sit with Peter and weep over how we've denied our Lord, but not stand with Peter in Acts 3? We'll stew in doubts and be skeptical with Thomas in the week before Jesus appeared to him – but not rejoice with Thomas that Christ is truly alive? I've heard people say to me, *"Pastor, I can't go to your church anymore, because you hammered on me too much with the Law."* I'm thinking, *"I was there too, and I know what I said, and the glorious Easter Gospel was all throughout that service!"* But . . . they didn't **hear** it. Sometimes we just can't HEAR it. Why? Because that sinful part of us remains – and it would just prefer to sit in

darkness / focus on the darkness, because it's afraid of the Light. As ridiculous as it sounds – the Easter season is foreign and even scary to people, sometimes even us, so we don't want to hear it.

BUT – the Word of God is even **more** powerful than our sin and darkness. And – the Light of Easter shatters the darkness and even penetrates into the deepest recesses of our hearts. When the risen **Jesus** shows up He obliterates the darkness / He blows away our doubts / He wipes away our sin – and He says: ***"PEACE be with you! Here – start a new season in pure Easter grace!"***

Let's go spend some time with Peter after Jesus reinstated him. Let's go hang out with David after Nathan rebuked him and God forgave him. Let's shed some tears of JOY with Thomas after Jesus appeared to him; when all his doubts and fears had fled away.

Let's begin that **new season** and *enjoy it / embrace it!* Now is the time for us to soak up the "beautiful weather / the sunshine" of this Easter season and let it transform our lives! You can actually enjoy the fact that you can (and do) repent! It's proof the Holy Spirit is working in you. And – it means you can actually leave the past in the past. You can leave all the ugliness there on Good Friday – and walk away from it. Your sins are wiped away – let them go, for Easter is proof of your forgiveness. Bring on the times of refreshing – times of HOPE and JOY – for heaven is your home and you have a beautiful future ahead of you. And – Christ Jesus Himself, the Messiah, is always with you, because He promised that. *If God is for us, who can be against us?* Jesus said we don't have to worry about tomorrow – for HE is with us. So – bring on the confidence / the power / and the certainty the Apostles had in their Easter season. Their circumstances and the dangers didn't really change at all – it just didn't matter to them now that they entered the Easter season. No more hiding behind locked doors, for the gates of hell themselves cannot prevail against God's holy and chosen people.

And – I know, we're still patiently waiting for that next season we haven't experienced yet: **The Glory Season**. But, as certainly as Isaiah looked forward to Easter, we can look forward to this new season too – for HE promised it. One day, down the road, maybe even very soon – suddenly it will arrive, when God flips that switch and turns another page. But . . . until that Day, we have the **Easter Season** – and it's fantastic, so let's enjoy it!!