

Sermon for April 12th, 2026
SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

READINGS

Ezekiel 37:11-14

11 Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.’ **12** Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. **13** And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. **14** And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD.”

Psalm 33

[Collect verses in **bold**]

- 1** Shout for joy in the LORD, O you righteous!
Praise befits the upright.
- 2** Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre;
make melody to him with the harp of ten strings!
- 3** Sing to him a new song;
play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts.
- 4** For the word of the LORD is upright,
and all his work is done in faithfulness.
- 5** He loves righteousness and justice;
the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD.
- 6** By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,
and by the breath of his mouth all their host.
- 7** He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap;
he puts the deeps in storehouses.
- 8** Let all the earth fear the LORD;
let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!
- 9** For he spoke, and it came to be;
he commanded, and it stood firm.
- 10** The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing;
he frustrates the plans of the peoples.
- 11** The counsel of the LORD stands forever,
the plans of his heart to all generations.
- 12** Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD,
the people whom he has chosen as his heritage!
- 13** The LORD looks down from heaven;
he sees all the children of man;
- 14** from where he sits enthroned he looks out
on all the inhabitants of the earth,
- 15** he who fashions the hearts of them all
and observes all their deeds.

**16 The king is not saved by his great army;
a warrior is not delivered by his great strength.**

**17 The war horse is a false hope for salvation,
and by its great might it cannot rescue.**

**18 Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him,
on those who hope in his steadfast love,**

**19 that he may deliver their soul from death
and keep them alive in famine.**

20 Our soul waits for the LORD;
he is our help and our shield.

21 For our heart is glad in him,
because we trust in his holy name.

22 Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us,
even as we hope in you.

1 John 5:1-5

1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. **2** By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. **3** For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. **4** For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. **5** Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

John 20:19-31

19 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” **20** When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. **21** Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” **22** And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. **23** If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

24 Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. **25** So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”

26 Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” **27** Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” **28** Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” **29** Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; **31** but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Our text for meditation this Second Sunday in Easter is on our Epistle reading.

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

Introduction

St. John begins this part of his Epistle with an easily understood message. We can format the first two verses for an even simpler understanding.

Question 1: Who is born again?

Answer 1: Those who believe in Jesus.

Question 2: What do people do who believe in Jesus?

Answer 2: They love God by loving other Christians.

Question 3: How do we love other Christians?

Answer 3: By obeying God's Commandments.

Very well then, we have our message. And we as Lutherans understand that the Commandments of God are summed up by the two greatest Commandments: to love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength, then to love your neighbor as yourself. The Ten Commandments teach us how to fulfill these two, and so we have our catechisms to explain it even further. This is what Christians are supposed to do. For two thousand years now, Christian morality has been self-explanatory; worship only the true God, don't take His Name in vain, sanctify the holy day, honor your parents, don't kill anyone, don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't bear false witness, don't covet your neighbor's stuff and don't covet his life. Follow all of these, and you will be an upright and moral Christian who loves God and his neighbor.

But Then...

But then St. John hits us with a statement that confuses and frustrates us. After giving us this simple rundown, he says "His commandments are not burdensome." My friends, in your experience does this feel true? Do you feel *unburdened* by the Commandments of our Lord? Christians are called to sanctification, cooperating with the Holy Spirit as He works in our hearts; this means that we are under a sort of pressure to sin less over time, feel true contrition when we mess up, and continuously learn to do better and better. It isn't just about sinning less, but having a comprehensive obedience that continues to grow. And as that obedience increases, so does our awareness of where we fall short.

To add to this, each one of the Ten Commandments is so exceedingly broad in application that one could never get to the bottom of them. Let's take an example, one near to everyone's modern experience: "you shall not commit adultery." Under this commandment, anyone who is does of any sexual activity with another human being who is not their lawfully-wedded spouse (who is necessarily of the opposite sex) is guilty. Fornicators, adulterers, homosexuals, all of them are guilty and hellbound so long as they do not repent. We might think "fine, so I will wait until marriage." Good! But you and I both know that it does not stop there. Oh no, you see Christ forbids us from coveting members of the opposite sex,¹ and that means we must excise any impure thoughts from our minds about the people we know before it turns into coveting them sexually, and this also means avoiding pornography so that we don't turn ourselves into degenerates, but then so much is pornographic in society today that we have to avoid half of what we see in our daily lives so as to not be ridden with guilt. Now repeat the process with every facet of the Decalogue. My friends, St. John says that God's Commandments are not burdensome; does that not sound *burdensome* to you, having to exercise such self control at all times?

1 Matthew 5:28

And then he says that the people who are born of God overcome the world – that is, the world as in organized nonbelieving humanity, not creation itself. Do you feel as though there is a great victory at your hands? Well, as things stand now the Church is on the back foot as secularism and a rising vague paganism have been taking over in formerly Christian lands. Persecution is on the rise – and we should know, being in the Catacomb Synod! But world over, Christians that mean it are being punished for trying to be faithful to the Word, up to and including being sent to jail or suffering violence.² Yet here St. John says that the one who believes in Jesus has...*overcome* all this? And not *will* overcome, but *has* overcome. So not only are we told that we ought to spend our lives trying to deal with all these Commandments, but now we are supposed to rejoice that we have overcome the world...which is currently grinding the Church's face into the dirt. How on earth do we make sense of all this?

The Unburdened and Victorious Christian

Some exegetes have pointed to the *relative* lightness of Christian living compared to the Old Covenant – that is, the Mosaic Law. We do not have to get circumcised, we don't have to eat kosher, we can wear mixed fabrics all day and there are no more animal sacrifices. Believers no longer have to present themselves at a physical Temple or Tabernacle and the cleanliness laws are null. Believers do not have to go to a priest for prayers and forgiveness, because the priesthood has been returned to a universal state. St. Peter refers to the Mosaic code as something that “neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear:”³ *surely* being freed from these requirements makes God's Commandments lighter, they reason. But that is not the only thing that makes it easier.

Truth be told, the Christian is *free* from the curse of the Law altogether: Christ redeemed us from it by shedding His Blood for our sins.⁴ The very commandments that told us we ought to die and then burn forever are no longer threatening us. You see my friends, the Law tells the unregenerate “this is what you have to do;” *we* tell the Law, “this is what I *want* to do.” The Law says to the nonbeliever, “you are damned because you love neither God nor your neighbor;” the Christian says to the Law, “I am forgiven of my sins, now teach me to love God and my neighbor.” To the Christian, the Decalogue is no longer a set of stipulations that we are guilty of breaking. Now, by the work of the Holy Spirit these Ten Commandments are woven into our very essence, motivating us to follow their every word so as to make our joy complete.

This is why St. John says that it is our faith which wins victory over the world. The world, which still resides under the curse of the Law, absolutely *hates* our freedom in Christ. They are burdened, cursed, and bound by the condemnation of their souls on account of their sins, but we are not. The persecutors deeply desire that all men should be as they are, and their leader the devil rages against even one soul being brought to salvation – but here the believer stands fast in freedom, singing the praises of our Savior. Our victory comes by our freedom which is won by our Savior and appropriated to us by faith.

That victory is not our own doing, and neither is our faith. The Apostle speaks of a believer as one who has been “born of God.” An infant is neither conceived nor born of its own volition, as it is by a father's will that the conception occurs and a mother's body determines the birth. Our faith, and the victory which comes from it, is all a gift from God which we only had the option to either reject or receive, not something which we appropriated by our own efforts. Christ won the ultimate victory for us on the Cross and in His Resurrection; we receive faith by the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments, and thus this victory is assured; we could not do this by our own power, so Christ has done it for us. There is no greater freedom then, and there is no greater victory,

2 Some of the recent examples can be found here:

<https://www.gottesdienst.org/gottesblog/2026/4/1/anti-christian-nationalism-success-worldwide->

3 Acts 15:10

4 Galatians 3:13

than to continue steadfast in our continued belief in Jesus.

Conclusion

To summarize, St. John teaches us that because Jesus has brought us to the faith, we are now free in Him to live as Christians. We do not obey the Commandments *in order* to be saved, but because we *are* saved we desire to live according to them – which as we are sanctified leads us to greater freedom in the first place.

I will exhort you though my friends, *never give this freedom up*. Whoever would try to bring you out of the Christian faith is an agent of the world trying to force you back into bondage under the curse of the Law. Whoever else would tell you that being Christian is fine but we have to be justified by our works, that person is a crass judaizer trying to enslave you as well. Never forget the tyranny of Rome and the Orthodox, who decided to place heavier burdens than the Mosaic code on the shoulders of Christians through their penances, indulgences, fasting, monasticism, prescribed daily masses; again all of these are judaizing heretical practices that deny Christian freedom. My friend, St. James adds to St. John's words with the Law of Liberty⁵ - someone who lives as a forgiven and forgiving man, someone who *loves those born of God*. And that is who you are now. You are born again by faith in Christ, brought to love for the saints by the power of the Holy Spirit, free from all the burdens of endless requirements and stipulations by the victory of Jesus over death and the devil. And because of this, you are free, victorious, and unburdened indeed.

Now the Peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.

5 James 1:12