

Happy Eastertide! What was that? Eastertide? Yes! The forty days from Jesus rising on Easter Morning until His ascension into heaven are part of what in the church is called Eastertide. (And **this** kind of a tide has nothing to do with a big ocean wave **or** with the leading brand of laundry detergent.) Like Christmas and Christmastide, the redeeming work of God does not end on the day of celebration, but His promises are fulfilled on those days, and the live-giving power of His work begins to **flow** out around the world and through time. Is it **still** Eastertide? Yes, even after the ascension, another ten days until Pentecost are also part of this season of Easter. Today is the seventh and final Sunday of these fifty days called Eastertide.

During Eastertide, we continue to listen to God's Word inform us of the impact, the significance of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Jesus has risen and He **continues to rise** through His words into our hearts, minds, and souls.

In today's Gospel lesson we reach back to the night when Jesus was betrayed to raise in our thoughts the value of what Jesus was saying. Once more before He's crucified, Jesus prays for His disciples. Very soon, He will leave their sight, no longer to be visibly present. So, here's part of what Jesus prayed: "Holy Father, **keep them** in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. While I was with them, I **kept them** in your name, which you have given Me. I have **guarded them**" (vv 11b-12a).

Did you notice Jesus talks about keeping, guarding His disciples? This was something **He** had done and now is asking the Father to do. Jesus asks the Father to **envelop** them in His love, even as God's will is that His Word and Spirit would envelop **our** whole life in His love for **us**. Envelop? Yes, like "envelope," but pronounced differently because we're not talking about paper that surrounds a letter you mail. Nor are we talking about being enveloped as if surrounded by an attacking army and under siege. That's not the way love works. Rather, the love of God in Christ **envelops** us much like a mother envelops her child— first in the womb and then in her arms.

It's actually very fitting on Mother's Day to consider the similarity between a mother with her infant and our Redeemer's relationship with us! Think about it: Was your life ever **better** than when you lived in the care of your mother? Meals-cooked and served for you. Clothes- bought, pressed, and laid out for you, or when you were really young, put upon you. The service doesn't get much better. So, why did you leave? My point is: The love and care our moms had for us has so much in common with the love and care our Savior has for us.

I. In our Gospel, Jesus anticipates the determination of corrupt human nature to leave, abandon, even renounce **His** love for us. Jesus must go on in His prayer to

admit that already during His earthly ministry, one of His closest friends would leave the envelopment of His love: “I have guarded them,” He prays in verse 12, “and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction” (v 12b). Already by this moment on Maundy Thursday night, Judas has abandoned Jesus to guide those who would arrest Him. In our reading from Acts, you heard the disciples choosing a replacement for Judas, who as Peter said, “turned aside to go to his own place” (Acts 1:25).

Judas and countless others before and since leave God’s enveloping love because of a corruption that infects all people. What is it? Why do we grow to twist and kick our way out of our mother’s arms and out of God’s embrace?

This is the first Mother’s Day that my mother is now in heaven. As I think back on the many fond memories I have of her, I am reminded of the multiple stories my mom told about me when I was young, (You can probably relate to all the stories your mother had about you.) I particularly remember the story of how in church when I was two or three years old, I was very loving towards my mom, with lots of hugs, hand-holding, and kisses on the cheek for her. My behavior even caught the attention of the Pastor one Sunday, as he commented to her after the service, “My! What an affectionate young boy you have there, Joanne!” Well, like most boys, as I got older, I went through a phase as a child, when by about the age of 7 or 8, I wanted to prove my bravery and independence by not holding her hand while crossing the street. I remember how I would pull away, so proud was I, that I wanted to cross a busy street, even run across that street by myself, even though I remember knowing it was wrong and was distressing to her. (Now, of course it would be so wonderful to hold her hand again, but that will have to wait until we’re reunited in the Lord’s presence in heaven.) But, thinking back to those days, how is it that a boy so young could already be aware that he is not a good boy and that his mother was so distressed by his actions? **That’s** the magnitude of sin in our lives—and the awareness, even from a very young age, that sin is making trouble for us.

How quickly did sin infect humanity with that result? How old was Adam when he was determined to replace God’s design for creation and our relationships with his own- bossing Eve and blaming God? How old was Cain when he murdered his brother Abel? How long after that was it until God said that every intent of the thoughts of people’s hearts was only evil all the time? (Gen 6:5)

The corruption from Adam in us is so powerful that we would not only twist and kick our way out of God’s design for life in creation, but we would also turn against Him, hold Him in contempt, and then turn against those around us with contempt as well. It’s a shock to consider our rebellion against God compared to His creative *love* for us, just as it’s a shock and bitter deep grief whenever children turn against their

mothers. What has God ever willed for you and me that's bad for us? What has a godly mother ever willed for her children that would do them harm? In all honesty, it has been **our** self-determination, **our** will against God's will and against family and neighbor; that has made all the trouble.

Judas was lured into rebellion against God and antagonism toward neighbor- at least in part- by choosing a false god, money. But why bother with a middleman? In Adam's image, we insist on being our own gods, as if we had not been given our life by God and by means of our parents. After all, the real idols in history and in our lives are not images carved in wood or stone, but images of ourselves that we worship. What drives social media? Why did taking "selfies" spread like wildfire and to this moment consume so much of so many peoples' thinking? We make gods in our own images, just as Adam did. We craft an image of ourselves, now digitally, by showing the world how we are in control, how we look better, have more of what's better, and are busy doing more of what's better than anyone else.

Through this and all of our sins, we've run far, far away from home! But what's it like to compete on our own among people when every intent of the thoughts of our hearts is only evil all the time? Desperate.

II. In our desperation, God calls to us. When the Law shatters our image, God raises us up in the image of His only-begotten and beloved Son. The miserable trial, suffering, and cursed death of Jesus not only impresses on us the consequences of replacing God with our own ego **but** also demonstrates God's redeeming and re-creative work. The wages of sin **is** death, but the gift of God is salvation through Jesus Christ our Redeemer.

Jesus doesn't dwell on Judas's desertion but immediately rejoices that His disciples will share in truths about God they haven't yet fully grasped: "Now," Father, "I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves... Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth." (vv 13, 17). The disciples were about to learn truths like how God sacrifices Himself to restore us, that God, who grieves over each dear child who leaves, never forgets His care for us and so continually reaches out to envelop us again in His love.

The incarnation of Jesus celebrated at Christmas proves the truth of God's creative power. Yes, God taking on human flesh in the person of Jesus means that all of His promises to renew us in His image are true. The way God sanctifies us by means of His Word with water in our Baptism is true (like we saw Him do for little Bryson here this morning). The meal Jesus instituted with His apostles on that night of our text truly conveys His life to us in His very body and blood with bread and wine. In Jesus' prayer to His Father on our behalf, the grace and love of God truly envelops us.

III. God's love in Christ envelops us even in those days when our evil world threatens

to have its way with us. “Father,” Jesus prays, “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you **keep them** from the evil one... As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world” (vv 15, 18). While they are in the world, Father, keep them; envelop them in your love.

This world is evil, the domain of the evil one. But the love of God envelops us all-the way our atmosphere envelops the earth and makes it such a beautiful, habitable place. And even as we live in this evil world, God’s Word is at work, renewing, regenerating our souls in the image of Christ, and inspiring our souls with the power of the Holy Spirit. So, when Jesus takes His rightful place in our lives as God, we let go of everything else, especially our corrupt ego, and embrace and hold Jesus tight, the way a frightened child runs to and finds deep comfort in the arms of his mother. Fear of the loss of all things, in the world of idolatry and human corruption, makes us desperate for a safe place. The love of Christ for us renews a soul that clings to the source of its renewal.

And the renewed, regenerated soul never outgrows its childlike grasp to our Redeemer’s hand. Remember the enduring command of God to us that provides fulfilment of all the others: “If you are truly my disciples, you will **remain** in my Word and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free”, John 8:31–32.

John’s Gospel devotes five chapters to the words of Jesus to the apostles on that evening before His crucifixion. These words are just as much for us. This side of Easter, we see more clearly how the love of God the Father enveloped the life of the Son and provided for His incarnation, so that He could substitute His life for us and, by doing so, redeem us. The words of Jesus before and after His crucifixion let us see honestly the consequences of the corruption and idolatry we inherit from Adam. An honest look at ourselves under the Law is how God works repentance in us, turning us away from corruption and idolatry and turning us to His loving embrace in His Word and Sacraments.

Here, in the loving arms of God, He reminds us that our soul is regenerated in the image of Christ. God’s regenerating work brings us back into His loving arms and thus back into communion with our family, our fellow Christians, also. He even makes us His ambassadors to the whole human family. What an embrace!

Happy Eastertide! Happy Mother’s Day! Amen.