

## Sermon: Easter 2 (April 7, 2024)

Jack wakes up with a significant hangover after attending a company's party. He doesn't normally drink, but one toast led to another to the extent that he didn't even remember the Uber ride home.

In the morning, he forced himself to open his eyes. The first thing he sees is a couple of aspirins next to a glass of water by the bed. With them, was a single red rose! He sits up and sees his clothing in front of him, all cleaned and pressed! He looks around the room and sees everything is in perfect order, spotlessly clean.

He takes the aspirins, then cringes when he sees a huge black eye in the mirror. Then, Jack notices a note hanging above the bathroom sink. It was written with little hearts on it and a kiss mark from his wife in lipstick: "Honey, breakfast is on the stove," the note read, "I left early to get groceries to make you your favorite dinner tonight. I love you, darling! Love, Jillian."

He stumbles to the kitchen and sure enough, there is hot breakfast, a steaming hot coffee, and the morning newspaper. Jack's 16 year old son is at the table, eating. He asks, "Son, what happened last night?"

"Well, you came home at like 2 AM, drunk out of your mind," the son said. "You fell over the coffee table, broke it, and then you puked in the hallway. You got that black eye when you ran into the door."

Confused, he asked his son, "So, why is everything in such perfect order and so clean? I have a rose, and breakfast is waiting for me on the table?"

His son replies, "Oh THAT... Mom dragged you to the bedroom to put you to bed. When she tried to take your pants off, you screamed, 'Leave me alone, I'm married!'"

That joke, though perhaps a bit tasteless for a sermon, is more relevant to our Scripture for today than we may want to acknowledge. It tells of an embarrassing incident, doesn't it? But we also witness faithfulness, and we see forgiveness and restorative love in action with commitment and care that is observable by others.

Friends, that is the perfect description of what Church is suppose to be about. People, all of whom are embarrassed about something, gathered together around a common faith, to share forgiveness, reconciliation, and to loving and care for each other in a way that is noticed by others.

Let me start by saying, “Nobody is perfect!” With the exception of our Lord and Savior, “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23) Or, as 1 John puts it, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”

You are not perfect. However, because of the love of our Lord and Savior, you are being made perfect. The question is: Am I letting God make me more perfect? Am I letting the transformative powers of Scripture, the Sacraments, and the Holy Spirit mold me more into the likeness of Jesus, more like the One who is perfect?

Now, I want you to look around this room. No one is here by accident. Every person is meant to be here at this moment. Even people joining us virtually, it is no accident that you are counted among the believers of this place at this particular moment in time.

Some of us here have a lot in common with Jack, the guy who came home drunk. There are things we are embarrassed about, or should be embarrassed about.

A few in this room are like the woman who helped her drunken companion, constantly demonstrating restorative and forgiving love.

Unfortunately, most of us are like the 16 year old child. Don't want to get overly involved. Just her for the free food.

If we are to be like the disciples, which is a really good example for us to strive towards, ALL of us are to be embarrassed by the fact that we do not love God with our whole heart, mind, strength and every fiber of our being. And, we ALL are to be embarrassed because we don't love our neighbor as ourself.

It is my job to tell you that you are forgiven for not being perfect, but it's also my job to ask: Are we being transformed into the likeness of Christ? Are we taking care of each other when we stumble, when we are hurting? That is who we are supposed to be, or do we prefer to just sit back and watch?

That's all well and good, Fr. Scott, but what does this have to do with the Scriptures? I'm glad you asked! Let's pick out some of the key lines in today's readings.

Ps 133 begins, “Oh, how good and pleasant it is, when brethren live together in unity!”  
Are we living together in unity?

Acts tells us, “Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul . . . everything they owned was held in common. There was not a needy person among them, (money) was distributed to each as any had need.” (Acts 4:32-35) Are we of one heart and soul? Is there anyone needy among us? Are we distributing our extra to each as any has need?

1 John reads, “if we walk in the light (of Christ) we have fellowship with one another.” Are we walking in the light of Christ? Or, do we prefer to hide in the darkness? Do we have godly fellowship with one another?

Finally, we get to the Gospel. Jesus appears to the faithful. “Peace be with you,” our Savior states. I don’t know about you, but I could certainly use more peace. The funny thing is that peace is not something we get, it’s something we share. Are we sharing peace?

“If you forgive the sins of any,” Christ continues, “they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” Are we forgiving sins? Or, are we holding grudges? If you are holding a grudge, then you are retaining another person’s sin. Their sin is on you! Why would you retain someone else’s sin?

Unfortunately, Thomas wasn’t there, was he? What did the community of faith do? Did they just leave Thomas out? No! The story strongly suggests that the other disciples rushed to tell him, “We have seen the Lord!” They wanted to bring him into the excitement.

Thomas responded, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

Did the disciples say, “Off with you, Thomas, faithless human”? No! They said, “Ok, Thomas, see you next week at Church.”

In no uncertainty terms: We are to follow the example of these early Christians. We are to live together in unity. We are to share what we have, so that no one in our faith community goes hungry. We are to be in fellowship with one another, forgiving others for not being perfect as our Savior is perfect, while helping each one grow to be more like Christ through love and support.

The disciples are our example, and just to be clear, they didn't agree on much. Matthew, case in point, spent much of his life profiting from the Roman occupation and oppression, while Simon the Zealot devoted the his first decades of his life preparing to fight and overthrow Rome.

I don't think it was possible for Jesus to put together a more diverse group, prone to hostility and disagreement. And yet, they managed to get along. Despite all their differences, they were able to model, for us, what it means to be a forgiving, reconciling, and loving community. Because, amid all the things about which we can disagree, only one thing matters most: Faithfulness to Jesus.

You may be wondering: Fr. Scott, why are you pushing so hard about unity, forgiveness, love, and care? Well, there are three reasons: 1) That is what I believe the Scriptures are teach us today.

2) If we are going to continue to grow, it will be based on the Gospel of Jesus which teaches unity, forgiveness, love, and care.

And, 3) We are entering what I expect will be a tumultuous election year. Let me say: Whatever your political preference, I respect you! But, it's important to notice that our leaders are modeling for us hated and division, and those things do not aline with the teachings of our Savior.

From the perspective of the early Church, it almost doesn't matter who is the next Caesar because it does not change our mission to love and care for one another.

Also, it is my responsibility as a faith leader to insist: Do not let an opinion keep you from loving and respecting your neighbor. So, look around the room, again. Instead of coming up with stuff you don't like, see each person as God's precious child. Understand that every one of us is trying as best as we possibly can to be faithful to God in the crazy, mixed up world in which we are living.

So, let us do a better job with forgiveness, shall we? And, let's commit ourselves to a whole lot more unity with genuine care, support, and Christ-like love. Amen.