

March 31, 2024
The Feast of the Resurrection: Easter Day
St. Stephen's, Catlett; St. Andrew's, Ada
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Acts 10:34-43
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24
1 Corinthians 15:1-11
John 20:1-18

Here's something that may come as an Easter surprise for you: salvation comes to us in three price plans! We can get the basic, the deluxe, or the premium version. Or, if you want to keep this in Easter language, we can grab the small basket, the medium basket, or the great big one. No matter which one we choose, we get salvation. For our purposes, can we agree that salvation is nothing more than our ticket into Heaven when we die? We can add a bunch of stuff to that, like the end-user license agreements that nobody ever reads, but we really don't have to. No matter which one we choose, we end up in Heaven, guaranteed by God, and outlined in detail by Peter, Paul, and John.

The first salvation package comes to us from St. Peter, who was very surprised to learn in a dream that God extends salvation to everyone, not just to the Jews. The St. Peter salvation package, the basic one, costs only two things: one, that we fear God, which means having some respect for, and trust in, God; and two, that we do what is right. It doesn't even say we "always" have to do what is right; just that we do it. I can't think of too many people who don't have at least a modicum of respect for God, however they understand God, and who don't do what is right most of the time. That low price gets us our tickets to Heaven.

The next higher package is the deluxe version, the one St. Paul offers the Corinthians. This package includes the two requirements of the basic package, that we respect God and do what is right, and it adds standing up and holding firmly to the message, which for Paul, is the gift of salvation offered to everyone. This package delivers the same product as the basic package, but expects a bit more from us: more than just a little trust and respect and doing the occasional right thing. In this package, we have to stand up and hang on to our prize while others try and take it from us. We benefit from the effort not by a more glorious salvation – there is only one, after all – but by recognizing the benefits of that salvation more often in our everyday lives than we would from the basic package. We begin to see signs of God's work and protection all around us.

Seeing signs of God's work all around us brings us to the premium package of salvation, which comes to us from John's Gospel. John's package of course includes the costs and benefits from Paul's and Peter's, and adds a new way to look at our own lives. Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved looked into the tomb and saw linens. Mary Magdalene looked into the same tomb and saw angels. A few minutes later, Mary looked right at Jesus and saw a gardener. Just about everyone throughout John's Gospel is pretty confident in what they see, and just about everyone in John's Gospel sees wrongly. It's what Paul would later describe as looking through dirty glass. The premium salvation package includes enhanced vision so that when we look at something or someone, we're actually able to begin to see what God sees. With a little time and practice, we'll learn to look into an empty tomb and see not linens or even a couple of angels, but the reality of God's continuing and active presence in the midst of all that death and emptiness. With a little time and practice, we'll be able to look at one another and see the Face of God in all that person's quirkiness.

Easter is all about bringing life out of death, which is what salvation is also all about. There is only one salvation, three different price points, each based on what we're willing to trade for a better sense of the new life God is still raising up all around us.