

## How Are You Doing?

How are you doing? My dad used to confuse people with that question. He grew up in Chicago, and there, “How’re you doing?” is pretty much the same as saying, “Hi.” He used to pass people on the street and throw them off by that question. Since I didn’t grow up in Chicago, it threw me off, too. I considered it to be a polite question that you always answered with, “Fine, thanks. How are you?” It was only after I got older that I realized what my dad meant by that question. But that question can be more than a greeting or a polite gesture. We often hear it when we’re coming off of something hard. You’ve just lost someone you loved. You’ve just been yelled at by your boss or failed at something you really hoped would go well. So someone asks, “How are you doing?” What does that question mean? It’s asking how you feel. It’s asking about your mental and emotional state and whether you’ve started to heal. There’s at least one more thing that we can mean when we ask that question. You’re in the middle of an important assignment at work. You’ve got a make or break project at school. And your boss or your parent asks, “How are you doing?” They want to know about your progress. Are you going to get done in time? Is the finished product looking good or is there a problem?

### I.

**How are you doing?** Today, I want to ask you that question twice, with two slightly different meanings. A week ago, we gathered here for our Easter Festival service. We had special music and we sang a whole bunch of hymns because your pastor thinks that’s one of the best ways to celebrate Easter. Most of all, last Sunday we heard that our Lord has risen, just as he said he would and what that means to us. So today, I want to ask you, **how are you doing in the light of Jesus’ resurrection?**

The disciples could’ve been asked that question one week after Jesus rose. In our gospel lesson for today, we heard the story of what happened on that day. On Easter evening, Jesus had appeared to ten of the eleven surviving disciples, but Thomas wasn’t there. He refused to believe that Jesus had risen until he actually saw him and put his fingers into the nail prints in his hands. So Jesus came one week later and fulfilled Thomas’ conditions. We heard Thomas’ confession of faith. The other ten disciples heard that confession, too, but you have to imagine that they were all still recovering from the emotional roller coaster of Holy Week. On Thursday night, they had celebrated the Passover, the greatest holiday on the Jewish calendar, only to see Jesus arrested and dragged off in the middle of the night. By Friday afternoon, they all knew that he was dead. But early Sunday morning, the word came that he was alive. Eventually, they all saw him with their own eyes. By the time Jesus left them on this Sunday after Easter, they were full of faith and joy at their Savior’s resurrection. But it had to be an emotionally exhausting process. They were still trying to figure out what it all meant. There’s a reason why Jesus didn’t put them to work for almost two months after his resurrection.

Someone might have asked these men, “How are you doing?” Now we may not need the same kind of consideration a week after Easter. As much as we try to recreate the suspense of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, there is no surprise for us on Easter Sunday. We know how the story is going to end. But that doesn’t mean that Easter has no meaning for us. Jesus died for us. He died because that’s what we deserve. Death and hell are the God appointed judgment for sin and every one of us is a sinner. I’ve told you many times that all sin is really sin against the first commandment. If we loved God above all things, we would always obey him perfectly. We’d love our parents because they’re God’s representatives. We’d help our neighbor to keep his property and means of income because God gave those things to him. We’d never covet because we’d trust that God knows what’s best for us. And of course, if God came first in our lives every day of our lives, we’d need no encouragement to come and hear his word or study it at home. It would be our joy. The fact that we break every one of the Ten Commandments every day shows that there is another god in our lives.

That false god is our problem, even if we somehow manage to avoid committing sins that get people worked up. That false god in our hearts makes us idol worshippers and condemns us to death and hell. What is that false god? Ourselves. All human beings are born lovers of themselves. Little kids don’t have to be taught to be selfish. They have to be taught to share. While it’s true that we can get ideas for specific sins that we wouldn’t have thought of from other people, it’s also true that every one of us figures out ways to sin all on our own. We put ourselves first in our own minds and hearts over and over again. The penalty in God’s court for worshipping ourselves is death and hell.

Good Friday tells the good news that Jesus died that death in our place. He suffered that hell on the cross. And Easter Sunday says that he paid our debt in full. He rose to tell us that God has found us innocent in his courtroom, that eternal life with Christ is ours forever. We need to hear that message. One of the great ironies of being a Christian is that the more you know your Savior, the more you want to live a life that pleases him. The more you realize you aren't doing that, the more guilty you feel. We ride a roller coaster of joy in Christ and commitment to living for him, and utter failure and guilt and despair. My friends, what sin do you fall into over and over again? What part of your life does the devil seem to own? How much personal agony do you go through because of those failures?

Easter is God's way of saying that all that sin is gone. Jesus died and washed it all away. Jesus rose and God is satisfied. Your sin is paid for. You are perfect in his sight. How are you doing with that message? I hope and pray that every day, you take that message home and apply to your life, to your failures, to your sin and the consequences you have to live with. Jesus died and rose for you. Know that you are forgiven and loved and you will live with Christ forever.

## II.

Jesus does want us to live for him already here. The more we know Christ the more we are committed to living for him. That leads us back to our question: **how are you doing with your commitment to Christ?** God has given each of us so many hours and days and so much money and so many talents and gifts. He calls us to use them all for his glory. Now, that doesn't mean that we dedicate all our time and energy to working at church or that we give even a majority of our money to church. But it does mean that we live for Jesus. Believers who know their Savior make that commitment to live for him all day, every day. We could talk about that commitment from a thousand different angles. But today, I want to ask you to think about it in terms of what we traditionally call stewardship: our time, our talents and our treasure.

Several months ago, we asked you to make a commitment to serving God. We focused on your time and talents and passed out commitment forms and asked you to write down what you would be willing to do for the work of the Lord and to tear off a portion of that form and give it back to us. On the portion that you were supposed to keep, there was also a chart that called attention to proportional giving. How are you doing on the commitment you made? I won't ask about the form, because we only got a handful of them back. But how are you doing on your personal commitment to support the work of the Lord here at Peace?

From my perspective, you're doing great! Financially, we're in the best shape we've been in since I came to be your pastor. We've completely paid off all our past due debt, including the pension fund! We put a new roof on the church. We purchased new playground equipment. We had to redo the sewer connection at the parsonage and we are still in the black. That is a wonderful gift of God's grace. It is God's grace, because every dollar that came in was a gift not to Peace, not to the synod's pension fund, but to the Lord. It's God's grace because it's all the result of his work in your hearts. Praise God for his amazing gifts!

But our emphasis this year has been on time more than on money. That, too, has been a source of joy for me. The last two or three arbor days have been very well attended and we've gotten a lot of work done. There is still a lot of work to be done, and there always will be. But it's a blessing to see forward progress. The nominating committee is recruiting men for elections. They still need more. But we are seeing new men serve and men who had stepped out coming back to serve. We've got new volunteers to help with counting and altar care. I feel blessed to be serving here at this time because God is moving his people this way.

How are you doing with that? Does that list of ways that the Holy Spirit is working in our church encourage you or make you feel guilty? How are you doing on your commitment to Christ? There are many ways to serve the Lord. And we shouldn't neglect our children or aging parents or our jobs to serve at church and think that's better service to God. God calls us to do those other things. Whether we're talking about time or money, God loves a cheerful giver. It's not my job to guilt you into anything. But if you feel guilty because you know that you could be a part of what we're doing here and you have not given God a generous gift of your time or money, then maybe the problem is that you know that you are not being faithful. That's sin.

To that sin, God has called me to say, "In the stead and by the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you." Jesus died and rose to wash away even our failure to serve him faithfully in our church and our home and our job. He has forgiven all those times that we didn't do the work he called us to do and didn't support our church's efforts to reach out. All that sin is gone because our Savior rose. God loves you and he no longer sees your sin.

But if your problem is that you don't want to be a part of what we're doing and you'd rather pass it off to someone else, well that's a different story. God calls us to serve. Yes, there are many ways to do that and they aren't all here. But some of them are. This is your congregation. God calls us to do good to all people, especially to those of the household of believers. God calls us to let our light shine so that unbelievers may see our good works and give glory to God in heaven. God calls us to always be prepared to give an answer for the hope that we have. God calls us to bring an offering in proportion to how he has blessed us. You don't have to be on the church council to do those things. But God does call us to serve him by serving each other and by supporting the work of proclaiming the gospel. If you figure that's someone else's job, that's just sin.

But again, it's sin that Jesus died and paid for. It's sin that he washed away in his blood. It's sin that is gone forever in the light of the resurrection. Jesus rose and God calls you his own child. Jesus rose and God promises to work through that good news to make us want to live for him and to give us the power, day by day, to live that new life. God works in us to will and to do what he calls us to do here at Peace and in our homes and our jobs and in every other part of our lives. Easter reminds us how true God's promises are.

How are you doing? How are you doing with guilt and frustration and hurt? Jesus loves you and forgives you for all your sin and stands by you in all that life does to you. How are you doing with your commitment to live for him? Jesus works in you to change you so that you live as his child. A Christian life is a gift of God. How are you doing? Know that Jesus loves you and nothing will ever change that. Live in that love. Live in the light of his resurrection. Amen.