If you ever look at how big events are covered in the news you may notice that they follow a somewhat predictable pattern. The first few days largely deal with what happened, but as time passes there is a shift from the facts to more analysis. So, for example the headline in the Wall Street Journal on March 27th was, “Bridge over Baltimore Harbor collapses after ship strikes it.” It is basically s statement about what happened. However, within a few days the stories shifted and were less about the what and more about the why and how. So, on Monday, April 1st the same newspaper ran an article with the headline, “Cargo ships have now become supersized.” This article set out to explain how in the years between the construction of the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore and today, ships have grown much larger in size, making them capable of taking out a bridge. And in some ways, we see this same move from facts to analysis in our readings for the season of Easter. Last week on Easter Sunday it was about the events -- the empty tomb is found; Mary Magdalene sees the risen Jesus and so on. But this week the shift is starting. Sure, we still get some factual reporting. We have the resurrected Jesus coming to the disciples for the first time, but there is also some analysis, with larger questions being posed and somewhat answered. And this is most evident in the 1st Letter of John, which, while offering some factual reporting of the Resurrection is really more interested in trying to understand the ramifications of the Resurrection. That is, it seeks to answer what the Resurrection changed about our lives and our relationship with God.

John starts his analysis by first spelling out why he is qualified to talk about such things saying, “We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands.” From there he shifts to explaining what the events of Holy Week did by saying, “if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” So, we now know that through the blood of Jesus’ crucifixion we are cleansed from all sin. But then comes the fine print. Yes, Jesus was raised from the dead and yes this takes care of sin, but there is still something that is required of us. And the simple version of what is required of us is that we must be honest. John says it like this, “If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” So in order for the blood of Jesus’s sacrifice to work and for Jesus to forgive our sins we need to confess that we have sins in the first place.

And I want to stay with that thought for a minute because that can be a real sticking point in Christianity. Historically, the sticking point was with Jesus saying that he could forgive sins as he does in Matthew 9 where we read, “Jesus… said to the paralytic, ‘Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.’ And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, ‘This man is blaspheming.’” Today no one worries much about Jesus saying he can forgive sins rather we get hung up on believing that we could actually have sins that are in need of forgiveness. So why is this? Why do people believe that they are incapable of doing anything for which Jesus would need to die? I am not positive of the answer but I partly blame pride, modernism and probably the German philosopher Friedrich Hegel – just because it is always good to blame the Germans.

Let’s start with modernism and Hegel. Both of them gave us the idea of progress, that the world and we by extension are getting better. Now I do not completely disagree with the idea of progress. The cars we drive today are better than the cars people drove 100 years ago. Modern dentistry is much better at curing a tooth ache than what you would have gotten during the Civil War. But the issue becomes when we think that progress in one area must spread to another. But this is not true. We cannot say that the 21st century me must certainly be morally better than 18th century anybody. We are not good solely because of when we were born. But there is this sort of tacit understating by many these days that the arc of history has made us better than what came before. But if you push too much on this understanding and ask for an explanation of why modern people are so wonderful the answer usually comes down to not owning slaves or having participated in the Spanish Inquisition. Which are certainly good things to avoid, but I don’t think it gets us off the hook. To my mind we all come into this world with the same programming. It is like Hannah Arendt said, “Every generation, civilization is invaded by barbarians - we call them 'children'.” Our moral life starts from the same place as someone who was born 600 or 4,000 years ago and we do not start with a leg up just because we have an iPhone. To get better and to have real progress we need to admit that we have done wrong – we need to confess our sins. That is where progress begins.

I was reading a review of a new book about the baseball player Pete Rose. Most of you probably know his story but here is a quick recap. He holds the record for most hits in a career with 4,256 and yet is not in the baseball Hall of Fame because of a lifetime ban stemming from his betting on baseball. The review had this comment about his situation, “Mr. Rose had to simply confess to the obvious truth, that he had bet on the Reds as a manager and end up with a slap on the wrist. But Mr. Rose couldn’t do it, almost out of principle: To relent at the moment he was being accused, to admit weakness, to give in to his detractors, was against his personality.” And in many ways Pete Rose’s personality is a very modern personality. We will not relent; we will not admit that we could be wrong. And anyone, including the church who dares suggest that we might have sins in need of confessing must be ignored or ostracized. And this brings us to pride. C.S. Lewis explained pride this way, “Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man... It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest.” And, just like Pete Rose, our pride will not let us admit we are doing or have done wrong because if we did there is a risk that on some cosmic ranking scale, we would come in below someone else. Modernism mixed with pride has created a rather dangerous cocktail. It gives us a dysfunctional society in which everyone believes they are fully functional.

But that is not what John tells us today. In many ways what John explains in the reality of the Resurrection is very simple and quite easy. Jesus did all the hard work. He was the one who was beaten and hung on a cross to die. He also pulled off the Resurrection, which is no small feat. Our part is simply to confess our sins and ask for God’s forgiveness. And through our confession we are able to grow and to truly progress and get better. Change can only occur when it is firmly rooted in reality and the reality of our lives is that we are sinners. We are sinners who through our own actions are separated from God. But because of Easter this is no longer where the story ends. Because of Jesus death and resurrection, we have been made right with God and through the confession of our sins we may be God’s own this day and forevermore.