

Sermon | Easter Sunday  
12 April 2020

Alleluia. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Jesus lives. The victory is won. No matter what happens in our world, or in your life, nothing can change that fact. Death cannot have you. Because of Easter, death has become for the Christian, but a sleep, even a doorway, the entrance to eternal life. For death could not hold Jesus. The grave's cruel grasp could not hang onto him. The three sad days have quickly sped. The tomb is empty. The grave clothes lie neatly folded. And angels are there, preaching the Easter Gospel. *He is not here.*

Don't you remember? How he told you, time and again, that it would all go down like this? That this suffering, this death for sin, was all part of a plan? God's plan and purpose from before the foundation of the world to rescue sinners from death? The Father would send his only begotten Son to take up flesh to be beaten and flogged, to suffer and die, to be nailed to a cross. But look, look at what God has done.

How he has vindicated his servant. For Jesus trusted in God. Those were Jesus' words, even when the Psalmist said them: *you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your Holy One see corruption.* That is what Jesus trusted, even as he was enduring the pains of Sheol, even when there was no semblance of God's love left, no shred of evidence that the Father loved the Son. For there on the cross, divine justice was meted out upon him, the wrath of God was poured out on Jesus, in our place. But through it all, our Lord kept on trusting, kept on believing in Father's love, even unto death. He kept that perfect faith as a man, as one of us, to redeem us. For us so often fail to trust when God makes a promise.

But now, the Father has raised the new Adam from the dust, once again breathing into a man's nostrils the breath of life. And the grave lies defeated at Christ's feet. And the victory cry rings out from the hollow tomb. *O death where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory? Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* Can we learn to confess this wherever we go? In the crowded ICU unit filled with Coronavirus patients? Into the deathbeds and the morgues? At the scene of a car accident? In the midst of chemotherapy treatments? At the death of a child?

When all hope seems lost, and there is nothing for us to hang onto but this Word which promises your vindication? This Word promises that all of this will end. Every pain and sadness of this life. And God will raise you from the dead, just as he raised Jesus, to immortal and incorruptible life. For Christ has joined himself to you, his living flesh to your dying flesh. Christ has taken you with him on that same paschal journey with him—that journey to the cross, into the grave, out the empty tomb. And God has declared you righteous in Jesus Christ, holy, and forgiven in the blood of his Son.

Like the disciples and the women, we so often fail to believe in God's promises as we should. But look at what kind of love Jesus manifests to us at Easter, what kind of love he has for the disciples and the women and everyone. A forgiving love. He rises from the dead, and he is not angry. He is not angry with the disciples for abandoning him. He is not angry for Peter denying him. He is not angry, though all of them fell asleep, and failed to keep watch and to pray in his critical hour, when drops of blood fell from his face. He is not angry at the women for coming to the tomb and expecting to anoint a dead body with

spices, even though he said he would rise again on the third day. He is not angry at the disciples, when each and every one of them cowered in fear, having fallen into abject, miserable despair. Failing to trust his Word. Failing to hope.

But instead of coming to them in anger, Jesus comes back from the dead with mercy. He comes to them gently, with kind words. He forgives them, and speaks peace to them. Because this is precisely what he has won for them and for all the world by his death: God's forgiveness and God's peace.

Everything you have done and failed to do, each and every weakness and failure and shortcoming of your life is forgiven today. This is what Jesus brings with him out of the grave. Not only his own living flesh. But his living touch, which takes away sin, which dispels fear and despair, and works gladness and confidence and joy in the heart. He brings to his disciples and to all the world a fresh start and a new beginning. Along with the confidence that whatever happens to us, whatever scourge or pestilence befalls us, it will not separate us from his love. Alleluia. Christ is risen. **He is risen indeed. Alleluia.**

A Christian becomes wise, when the Christian learns to see the difference between uncertain things and that which is certain. There is a lot about our present situation that we do not know. There are many questions we do not have the answers to. How long will this last? How many people will this take? When can we, as a congregation come together again, to worship corporately in the house of God? When can we receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion, together as the body of Christ?

We simply do not know. And it does no good to speculate and wonder. Because it is not uncertain things we should be concerned about, but certainties. And especially today. What is certain is that, whether or not this current disease takes us, unless Jesus comes back first, we will all die. And we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. And at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, we will all be raised from the dead—even bodily, just as Christ was bodily raised, all humanity, together, on the Last Day.

But here is a certainty. Here is something we can count on and take to the bank. When we stand before God's throne, we know what his judgment will be. Because God's judgment was already pronounced on Good Friday and Easter. Christ cries out your judgment from the cross: *it is finished*. Your redemption is finished. The work of saving sinners from sin and death is complete. And everyone who trusts in Christ, everyone who has been baptized into his death and resurrection can live with the certainty of God's love, and the certainty that the judgment of forgiveness and peace has already been spoken over them.

And Jesus Christ is merely the firstfruits of them that sleep. In Israel the Feast of Firstfruits came three days after the Passover. It was a spring feast in which the initial portion of the barley harvest, barley which grew in winter and harvested in spring, was dedicated to God. The barley was beaten into a fine flour and eaten by the priests as a Most Holy Food: a sanctifying, cleansing, and life-giving food.

Jesus rose from the dead on the Feast of Firstfruits. If Christ is the first fruits of them that sleep, that means he is merely the first out of the grave. It means that more—the greater and more complete harvest—will soon be coming after him. It means—and this too, is a certainty—that we will experience Easter just as Christ experienced Easter, that this graveyard behind us will likewise give up its dead—your tomb will be empty—and you, with Christ, will be raised, and your bodies transformed, when he

comes again. But in the meantime, we together eat the Firstfruits as a holy priesthood of all believers. We gather around that table where Christ serves us with the bread of sacrifice, his own flesh and blood, to make us holy and to vivify our dying flesh. The Sacrament of the Altar is where we partake of Christ who is the firstfruits of them that sleep, that we might be made partakers of his resurrection.

And if you are sad, if it grieves your heart today, as it does mine, that we cannot celebrate this Feast together, do not be sad. Instead, rejoice. For through this time where we are bereft of the Supper, God the Holy Spirit would make you hungry: hungry for Jesus, hungry for his body and blood, hungry for his coming again in glory, hungry sanctuary, hungry for the saints, hungry for an end to the scourge, hungry for God's rescue, his deliverance, his life and salvation. And your hungry souls God will feed, here in time, and there in eternity, in the Feast of the Paschal Lamb who was slain, and has begun his reign.

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VOTUM.