

The Festival of the Resurrection of Our Lord
17 April, Anno Domini 2022
St. Mark 16:1-8

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Dear people of God, I pray that each of you might raise your heads a little higher having said that. I pray that each time an alleluia passes your lips at least a moment of joy and peace settle into your hearts. I pray that with the glory of each Easter hymn, the treasures of Christ grow more precious to you and the things of this world shine less and less. I know that in our midst there is great heartache and suffering. You see the world descending further and further into madness. You are shocked and saddened by the absence of those who once joined in the festal throng going up to the house of the Lord but who have been lured away by worldly cares and pleasures. It is not lost on you that it is getting harder and harder to remain in the faith and you fear what awaits your children. Many of you are heavy with the heartache that creeps in with every thought of a loved one who has recently passed from away from this world. Every bit of news is filled with reports of war and economic collapse and corruption and murder. Everywhere we turn death is rearing its ugly head and wreaking havoc wherever it can.

BUT...Jesus is risen! That is a fact. That is not some pious hope. It was not a metaphorical or even just spiritual resurrection. Just ask Thomas. Those were real wounds that he was invited to touch. The same Jesus who had willingly suffered such cruel torture and humiliation at the hands of those who hated Him, who had cried out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me", and at whose death the temple curtain was torn apart and the rocks were split and the graves of many saints were opened - He is alive. Your Redeemer, the Redeemer of the whole world has observed the great and final Sabbath having made all things new. He fulfilled the promise of God to our first parents by crushing the head of the serpent, putting enmity between Satan and us, and opening the gates of eternal life to all who would believe. His sabbath is over. Ours has begun. He has left death and the devil defeated in the dust and stands in our midst to bestow that divine rest upon us, the rest that only the forgiveness of all our

sins and defeat of death can bring. Your works and your striving cannot save you. That delusion is shattered by the angelic sermon "Jesus is risen. He is not here." Your afflictions and crosses have been emptied of their terror because the Son of God has passed through death and stripped Satan of the one weapon he actually had - your guilt and the fear of eternal judgment. That has been taken away from you. Jesus bore that. It is finished. The tomb is empty. He is alive.

"Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning" writes the psalmist. (Psalm 30:5) The righteous wrath of God had been poured out in horror upon His Son on the great and terrible day of the Lord. The women of Jerusalem wept bitterly at the awful sight. But the time of weeping and sorrow has ended. The darkness of Good Friday has passed because the sacrifice has been accepted. This is the day, the eternal day which the Lord Jesus Christ has made by His atoning death. This is the eternal day of triumph and rejoicing because the power of sin and death over YOU has been destroyed. That is why the Son of God assumed our human flesh. Of course death couldn't hold God. But Jesus died as a man. He rose as a man. St. Paul so beautifully writes "For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:17) Our father Job understood this. He knew that because His Redeemer lives, he too would live and that he would look upon his Redeemer's face with his own eyes, eyes that at the very moment he spoke those words were filled with tears of immense physical and emotional pain. You too, as God's people, can be filled to overflowing with the same joy and shout "Alleluia" a hundred times over even when everything is exploding all around them because Jesus' resurrection is the iron-clad guarantee that no punishment remains for your sin, that the full wrath of God has been spent, that nothing in all of creation - no matter how awful or painful or sad - will be able to separate us from God's love, and that this life of sorrow and sin will give way to the life of joy beyond telling in God's eternal kingdom.

That's why Sunday is now the day on which God's people gather because on this day our King emerged triumphant from the war. On this day the glorious light of Christ shone forth into the whole world bringing life and salvation. On this day it was revealed to us that sin, death, and the devil had been conquered and we were free. Death no longer had power over

us. Death was no longer a thing to be feared. Christ was only the firstborn. St. Matthew tells us that many of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised in the moment salvation was accomplished on Good Friday. And I can imagine that these dear saints made up the host of captives Christ led in His train as He ascended to the right hand of the Father. And we will follow them! That resurrection to eternal life and joy is promised to all God's beloved children, all who have been Baptized and know Him and call upon Him as Father in true faith.

Christ's resurrection and your Baptism into His resurrection mean that you are no longer enslaved to sin and death. You have been set free. You are no longer a child of wrath. You are a child of God. You are no longer to be a slave to the passions of your flesh. You are a royal priesthood offering your lives as holy sacrifices to God, sending up the endless incense of your prayers on behalf of all to the throne of God. You are a wholly new creation, created by God in Christ Jesus for good works which He has prepared for you. Dispose of the old leaven of sin. Put away jealousy and strife. Put away fear and unbelief. Put away anger and covetousness. Put away selfish pride and ambition. Put away bitterness and resentment. Those things belong to the dead. You are of the living. Let none of those things remain in your life, not even a little. They are poison to you. They will do nothing but harm you. The angel asked that Easter morning "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" You will not find Jesus nor the life and peace that He brings among the dead and worthless things of this world. You will not find truth among those who despise the Word of God and who mock as foolishness the Word of the Living One. They are filled with only with death. You will not find Jesus in more financial security or more self-sufficiency or more popularity or more health. Those too are the things of the dead. Those are the things that the unbelievers chase after looking for some kind of peace and meaning in their life. But they are only chasing their tails. They will never find what they are looking for because the things of the living are not found among the dead. They are found with the Living One, Jesus Christ.

I know for many of us, Lent is one of our favorite times of the year - the beautiful hymns and services that draw our eyes to the great sacrifice of Jesus. Sometimes I want Lent, especially Holy Week, to last just a little longer. But it can't. It shouldn't. It doesn't, thanks be to God, because Christ is no longer dead. Good Friday is an event that happened in the past. It is exceedingly important that we do not pass by it or only give it

lip service. But it is not good for us to remain there as though Jesus is still dead. Jesus was taken down from the cross because salvation was accomplished. But what Jesus accomplished on the cross is eternal - the resurrection, the forgiveness of all your sins, your reconciliation with God! If we stop at Good Friday, if we will look no further than our guilt and its terrible price, then we are not receiving from God the very point of Good Friday. Yes, mourn your sin and acknowledge how deep your wretchedness in the light of the Crucified but then follow Him all the way to Easter and let your tears of sorrow be turned into shouts of joy and thanksgiving and victory. The eternal day of Easter has dawned and Christ's resurrection never comes to an end. The glory and majesty and joy of that day are forever. Even in the midst of Lent we are in Easter because if Jesus didn't rise from the dead then the sacrifice would have been in vain. But He did rise. The sacrifice was most certainly NOT in vain. Easter is why Good Friday is good. The joy and promise of Easter are new to you every morning. Every new dawn you rise as the redeemed of the Lord, bearing the sign of the + holy cross, a child of the resurrection whose sins are forgiven. That is just as true today as it was 2000 years ago and as it will be when the final trumpet sounds and our Lord returns on the clouds of heaven sitting on His glorious throne. And we look forward with joy to that day because of this day, the day when our Savior burst forth from the tomb alive, having marched through hell declaring His victory.

It's often said that every Sunday is a little Easter. That is certainly true. Because every Lord's Day our Savior stands in our midst to declare to all who labor and are heavy laden, to hearts that have spent the last week being burdened with sorrow and fear and sin that He is risen, to those who have suffered under scorn and abuse that He has taken away the sting of the grave. Jesus comes to speak peace to us who are filled with and surrounded by such constant unrest. He comes to draw our eyes up and away from the fleeting things of this world to the things of eternal life. He comes to feed us with the living Body and Blood that once hung lifeless on the cross. Let us then, instead of thinking of Easter as one special and important Sunday of the year, or of each Sunday being a little Easter, think of every Lord's Day as the same, high, joyous, festive day as this day. Let it find all God's children raising the festal shout as a mighty army. Let it find us gathered around the throne of our Living God and Savior.

Indeed, every day is a new day for us to rejoice in the resurrection of our Savior, our Brother, our Head. Where He is, there we too shall be. He is risen. So shall we. He has escaped the bondage of death. So shall those who confess their sins and receive in faith the forgiveness He speaks. He has gone to the eternal presence of God. So shall all who cast aside the riches and pleasures of this world and hold His Word as their highest and truest treasure by hearing and believing it. This new life of the resurrection belongs now to all who clinging faith to the risen Son of God. In your Baptism you have been given new life, new strength new powers. You have been raised from sin's death. It has no power to bind you or deceive you. The light of truth shines into this present darkness that you may see clearly what is pleasing to God and what is of the devil. You have been given the Holy Spirit that you might have the strength to deny the desires and passions of the flesh and instead seek first kingdom of God and His righteousness. You have been given a new mind and a new heart that you might fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

And while we still wait for our Savior to return and to remove sin from our flesh, indeed, this very moment we are enjoying a foretaste of what awaits us - standing before the throne of God, gathered together with Christ's holy people, being nourished and fed by the hand of our Lord, joining our voices with the angels and the saints. And this is not in some make-believe way but in truth! In Word, in wine, in bread the resurrected Christ is in our midst this hour to pour forth life and salvation to all who receive Him in faith.

Jesus, the crucified, is risen! The tomb is empty and He has gone before us into heaven just as He promised to prepare a place for us. You have been made new in the image of Christ. Set aside all fear and sadness. Let the whole creation sound forth loud songs of joy. Jesus lives!

Pr. Kurt Ulmer