

Sermon for the Feast of the Resurrection of Our Lord

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

I learned that just hours ago on this Easter morn, hundreds of saints were martyred in their churches by Muslim terrorists in Sri Lanka, and here we are, celebrating...

Recently, we buried Susan's father in a plot we purchased at the same time I purchased two additional plots for my own dying mother and father.

And not long before that, we buried the infant Lazarus who lived only eight days before he died - and here we are celebrating.

Russell Champlin, a friend of the Weidners,

Jack Gill, Mark Ochs' friend,

Joan Story, Gloria Pedersen's aunt, have all died within the past month,

and there is probably not a one of us here this morning who has not experienced the hurt, the suffering, the loss of those who we can no longer hug or speak with;

those who no longer sit at the table with us or in the pew beside us-

and here we are celebrating... Why?

Why do we celebrate when
we are surrounded by death and loss?

The answer, of course, is that death, that terrible enemy, that destroyer
of peace and communion and joy and wholeness has been defeated!

“For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of
the dead.

For as in Adam ALL die, so also in Christ shall ALL be made alive”
(1Cor 15:21-22).

“Now is death but
the gate of life immortal!” (LSB 490),

for Jesus Lives! The Victory’s Won -

Christ is risen; He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

So yes - we
celebrate! For today marks the beginning of new and everlasting life for all
mankind.

“Just as Adam was the head of the old humanity, such that his fall left
a legacy of sin and death to all his offspring,

so Christ stands as head of the new humanity” (Lockwood/Concordia Commentary
on 1st Corinthians), so that all who are born anew through Baptism
into Him shall be raised up with Him to life everlasting.

For “do you not know
that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His
death?

We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that,
just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father,

we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall
certainly be united with him in a resurrection like His” (Rom 6:3-5) -

which is why today, we celebrate...

Of course, not
everyone celebrates this day...

And even among those of us who are here, there may be some doubts...

After all, this whole idea of a man brutally beaten, flogged, crucified,
and impaled on a spear coming to life again and rising up from the grave is a
little hard to believe.

It is simply not a
reasonable idea, let alone a reasonable expectation -

which is why we had to be told about this in advance -

We had to be prepared for it so that we would know what to expect and be
able to believe it when it actually happened.

Christ crucified and
risen is the very means by which our humanity was to be restored to community
with God -

the very means by which we are to be raised up from death to life -

but it had to be revealed to us.

For apart from God's
Word on this matter, we would never have seen it coming,
and we would certainly never have believed it when it came.

The fact is,
however, that from the moment of Adam's fall, God told us of a Savior who would
bare his heel and suffer the devil's deadly strike,
that He might rise up and crush the evil serpent's head (Gen 3:15).

Afterward, from the
story of Joseph cast into the pit for three years only to be raised up and
seated at the right hand of Pharaoh (Gen Ch 40-41),

to the “sign of Jonah” three days in the belly of the great fish (Mat 12:39-40),

to the Psalm we prayed this morning that revealed that the Holy One would not be abandoned to the grave (Ps 16:10),

God has shown us exactly how His plan of salvation would play out so that we would recognize it when it happened!

It was NECESSARY
that the Son of Man be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified
and on the third day rise (Luke 24:7)...

Which is exactly what happened...

And yet, even then,
reasonable men and women doubted -

men and women who were there, who knew the Scriptures, who literally
followed Jesus -

who should have known better.

It was, after all,
plain as day - plain as the Light breaking the darkness:

The stone had been rolled away;

the tomb was empty;

the body of Jesus was not there;

the linen cloths lay by themselves...

and they did not believe (Luke 24:11).

Peter checked it out
for himself, but missed the miracle of God’s grace entirely as he went home to
puzzle out for himself what might have happened.

Of course, God could
have abandoned us then, and even NOW in our spiritual blindness and our hard-

hearted

unbelief... But He didn't - and He does not!

Instead, He does what He has always done: He comes for us by His Word -

He comes for us by His messengers -

He comes for us in person by His own body and blood, that we might hear and know the truth and have life in His Name.

He came first to the

women, then to the disciples on the road to Emmaus,

then to the 11 and then to all the apostles, Thomas included,

then to more than five hundred (1 Cor 15:6), and even to St. Paul himself -

ALL for whom He connected the dots of those OT Scriptures that pointed to Him -

ALL for whom He revealed the fullness of His resurrected body -

ALL to whom He entrusted this message for the life of the world -

the same message with which WE have been entrusted to this very day:

Christ is risen - He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

We are told that Christ

is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep;

the firstfruits of all who will be made alive in the resurrection from the dead (1 Cor 15:20; 23).

In other words, "Just

as the Israelites brought the sheaf of firstfruits to the Lord on the "Sunday" after Passover as a sign that the entire harvest belonged to Him,

so Christ's resurrection was the pledge that all who had fallen asleep in Him would be physically raised as He was" (Lockwood/Concordia Commentary).

Luther explained this clearly when he wrote, "Jesus is the Firstfruits since He takes the lead and draws the whole throng after Him.

For whenever a first one is mentioned, it is implied that more than one are involved.

The others who follow, the second, the third, and so forth, are included here,

all bound together, as many as have fallen asleep.

Otherwise, if Christ had risen alone and no one were to follow Him, He could not be called the First!" (AE 28:109).

But as St. Paul writes, "Christ has in fact been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor 15:20-22).

And so we celebrate!

"We must not let death and other misfortune, distress and misery, terrify us" as Luther concludes,

"for our confidence is built entirely on the fact that Christ has arisen and that we have life with Him already and are no longer in the power of death.

Therefore let the world be mad and foolish, boasting of and relying on its money and goods;

and let the devil rage and afflict us with all sorts of trouble -

Against all of this our one defiant boast shall be that Christ is our Firstfruits,

that He has initiated the resurrection,

that He has burst through the devil's kingdom, through hell and death,

that He no longer dies or sleeps but rules and reigns eternally, in order to rescue us, too, from this prison and death" (AE:28:111).

So let us gather as

the Baptized, the forgiven saints of God who have been invited to the feast.

Let us take our places in the Communion of Christ's body and blood that unites us with His resurrection victory over sin, death, and hell.

Let us celebrate this day with all the saints on earth and all those saints triumphant who sing the song of victory that never ends.

For there is now a

new heaven and a new earth, a new Jerusalem for a people of gladness.

"No more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress" (Isa 65:19).

No more shall there be any death, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore,

for the former things have passed away" (Rev 21:4).

He who was crucified

declares,

"Behold, I am making all things new."

For Christ IS risen - He is risen indeed!

Alleluia!

Preached by Pastor Holowach

Sermon texts: 1 Cor 15:19-26; Luke 24:1-12.