

“His Victory...and Yours”

John 14:15-21

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we continue in this joyous season of Easter, the celebration of the greatest victory the world has ever known has not ended just because Easter Sunday has come and gone. The last enemy of man—death—was conquered when Jesus Christ rose victorious from the dead. By His resurrection, Jesus took down the last obstacle between you and everlasting life in His eternal presence, side by side with all believers in His holy name. Nothing in history is more significant or more meaningful than His victory, which through faith has become yours. Easter is not just some passing day on the calendar. It marks the beginning of your eternal hope. It marks the victory of God’s people over sin, death, and the devil. Because of what Christ has done by His death and resurrection, you need not fear death, for you shall live forever. There is more than just this day-to-day struggle to look forward to, more than all the toys and gadgets, pleasures and fancies of this life that keep you going. Harken to your Lord Jesus as He proclaims to you in our text, “Because I live, you also will live.”

Think about how the disciples must have felt almost 2,000 years ago. What would it be like to see your closest friend and teacher seized as a common criminal, condemned unjustly to death, and then crucified on a bloody wooden cross? Their dreams and joys were shattered, spending their time believing that they had wasted 3 years of their lives in futile following, believing, trusting, and hoping for something better than what they had. All of it came to a crashing halt. Their hope ripped from them because of their unbelief and doubting the promises of their Lord. Having witnessed all of this heinous action toward their Savior, having seen Him buried in the tomb, and it sealed and guarded by the Roman soldiers, their sinful flesh overtook and caused them to despair. Jesus of Nazareth, their friend and teacher, was dead and buried. That was it.

But they do so underestimate the Lord. The morning of the first day of the week came and they discovered that it was not just another sunrise, but the fulfillment of His promise which He told them in the upper room in our text, “Because I live, you also will live.” Unlike other men who were buried, rotting, and stuck in the grave, He rose again! The disciples could not believe their eyes when He appeared to them that same evening. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Jesus is alive, and His victory is theirs—it is yours! Everything changed for them, because everything was built around that victory. Everything was built around the truth that Jesus Christ is living, having died the death that mankind deserves for its sinful wretchedness. Even when they met to choose the one

Rev. Josh A. Killion
Trinity Lutheran Church - Austin, Texas
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to replace the vile betrayer, Judas, it was a requirement that this man had witnessed the resurrected Christ, that He could from His eyewitness testimony proclaim the blessed truth that He is risen from the dead.

Jesus became to them even more wonderful than ever before. Death did not destroy Him, as Psalm 16 says, His holy One did not see corruption. Easter not only confirmed Christ's resurrection, but it gave new life to His people—to His disciples then, and to you and all who believe in Him. Spiritually, you were dead and buried with Him on Good Friday, just as Paul teaches in Romans 6. The disciples during those 3 days were essentially walking corpses, but when Jesus came to life on Sunday morning, something happened to them. Those fear-stricken men who could do nothing more than hide in heartbroken sorrow, were infused with new life. Their faith was reignited as their despair turned to joy, their doubt becoming utter certainty, and their unbelief turned to belief. The concrete truth that Jesus was dead and now lives will sustain them until the day of their resurrection which will be fulfilled according to His promise, "Because I live, you also will live."

But just like those fear-stricken disciples, your sinful flesh wants to deny all of these truths about the Son of God. It seeks to sow doubt in your mind as it works the will of the evil one to pull you away from the joy and hope that Christ's victory has given to you. Paul preaches at the Areopagus in our first reading, "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent." There is no one who can say that they didn't know. Christ has made Himself known to the world and every fiber of your sinful nature wants to obscure His death and resurrection from those who dwell in it. Because the death and resurrection of Jesus is the death and eternal corruption of your Old Adam. That old man desires your downfall—desires your turning away from the Lord your God, who has given all that you might live as He lives.

Your utter depravity would be your undoing if not for the grace of your heavenly Father. He has given you the escape from condemnation, rescued you from the dregs of death and destruction in which the devil would much prefer you to be. And He has done so by the gift of Holy Baptism. Through the blessing of His Holy Sacraments, He has given you His grace and mercy in the forgiveness of sins won by Jesus in His vicarious death. Peter says it so succinctly and perfectly in our Epistle lesson, "Baptism...now saves you." But importantly, this is "not as a removal of dirt from the flesh." The filth of sin will never be gone from you while you walk this earth. Your Old Adam is always with you, pushing you to fulfill your sinful desires rather than treasuring and holding the Lord's commandments.

As one who has been baptized into Jesus' death and resurrection, you are one who loves Him, and so you cast off that old man in the daily remembrance of your baptism. You cast him off as the disciples did in the presence of your crucified and risen Savior, rising once again as the new man who has received the Spirit of truth. This washing is a removal of dirt from the soul, from your inner being which is regenerated and filled with the Holy Spirit for the sake of Christ. And in the presence of His very body and blood, you are given His mercy in fullest measure, as you receive the forgiveness of your sins according to His promise. The disciples were being taught by Jesus at the table of the Last Supper in our text, where they would receive the same body and blood you will receive in a few short moments. You know Him, just as they did, because "He dwells with you and will be in you."

He has promised to make you His dwelling place until the day He calls you to the home He has gone to prepare for you. Until that day, He strengthens you in this life, continually feeding you with His Word and Sacraments, bringing you forgiveness, life, and salvation. As Paul says in our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, "In Him we live and move and have our being." He guides all your ways until the day His appointed Man will judge the world in righteousness. That Man is the God-man, the One whom He has raised from the dead to give us the assurance that He will fulfill His promise that "Because I live, you also will live." The victory is won, and the victory is yours. Through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism instituted by Christ Himself, you become heirs of the kingdom as those who have put on the robe of Christ's righteousness, burying your sinful flesh with Christ and rising anew with Him. You are God's offspring, and you have received Christ's inheritance as those who have been adopted into the sonship of your Heavenly Father.

Easter joy does not begin and end in a single day. That joy and the hope of what it promises through Christ's resurrection is with you every single day. In the dark moments of your life when all you seek to do is hide in the upper room like the Apostles, remember the gift that has been given to you. Remember the victory that has been won by Christ's blood and assured for you in His resurrection from the dead. Sin, death, and the evil one can no longer terrorize you as one who has not been forsaken by your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He is with you always. He will not leave you as an orphan, as one who has watched Him die and be buried leaving you with no hope. He will come to you. He will rise again, and has risen again indeed! There is no reason to despair of your sin, for He has taken all of it unto Himself that you would have a good conscience, knowing that you are loved by Your heavenly Father who loves you just as He loves His only begotten Son.

You need not look far for His help and comfort in times of need, because He is always near, caring for you and guiding to your heavenly home—to the fulfillment of His promise. As our closing hymn will proclaim:

In suffering be Thy love my peace,
In weakness be Thy love my power;
And when the storms of life shall cease,
O Jesus, in that final hour,
Be Thou my Rod and Staff and Guide
And draw me safely to Thy side!

The promise of your resurrection from the dead on the day of judgment is not just conjecture or blind hope. It has been cemented by the resurrection of Jesus, who tells you again and again as He comes to bring you His gift of forgiveness in His means of grace, “Because I live, you also will live!” It is a hope that He sustains in you by faith, and it is indeed the truth. You will live in His holy presence, never again to see corruption and to dwell among the heavenly host forevermore. His victory is your victory, and He will bring you into His glorious presence, where hope will become reality and joy will abound for all of God’s chosen offspring. Amen.