

Sermon 4-16-17 Victory! Matthew 28:1-10

Dear Victorious in Christ:

When Jesus died on the cross, all looked like it was lost.

- For the disciples who had believed in Him, all hopes were gone
- To the mortal eye, it looked as if God had lost and the devil had won.
- On the cross was the world's great Redeemer...
 - dead
 - defeated
 - humiliated

If the story had ended there, then we would be a sorry group of people this morning.

- 2000 years of baptisms, confirmations, sermons, communions and worship services would mean nothing
- Worst of all we would all still be dead in our sins
- We would have no hope of eternal life
- Death would still hold terror for us

Opponents of traditional Christianity know how essential the resurrection is to our faith.

- They know that without the resurrection of Jesus, the whole Christian house of cards falls down.
- That is why they do everything possible to call into question the truthfulness of this event.
- They do whatever they can to put Jesus back in that tomb
- They say it was all a lie invented by later followers of Jesus to preserve His memory

Today we rejoice that this is not where the story ended.

- That age-old enemy death had done its worst on Calvary.

- It has its way with the Son of God
- It sank its dreadful teeth into the author of life
- But its victory was short-lived
- Its dominion over the souls of men was brought to an end on the 1st day of the week, when early in the morning our Lord Jesus rose from the dead.

This is where we find the two Marys in the Holy Gospel today. Mark's Gospel tells us that these two women had gone to the tomb of Jesus early in the morning on the 1st day of the week to anoint the body of Jesus with spices. Matthew picks it up at the point where they come to the tomb and explains how the stone had been rolled away from the tomb: "And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it" 28:2

The women still in shock from the events of Good Friday, are now faced with the sight of a glorious angel whose appearance was like lightning and whose clothing was white as snow. The guards are frightened half to death, but the angel says to the women: "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified." 28:5

And then come those simple, yet joyously beautiful words: "He is not here, for He has risen, as He said. Come, see the places where He lay" 28:6

All was not lost!

- Death did not have the last word!
- Their faith was not in vain.
- The humiliation and death of the Son of God was part of God's plan to reconcile sinful men to Himself.
- It was necessary that Christ should suffer, be crucified and be raised again on the 3rd day.
- Over and over Jesus had told His disciples these words, trying to prepare them for what was coming.'

- But it was not until He rose from the dead and appeared to them alive that they finally believed in Him.

God's answer to sin – Good Friday

God's answer to death - Easter

- It was about God making restitution for sins by punishing them in His Son.
- Easter is God's answer to death.
- Easter is about God proving to the world that He had accepted the sacrifice of His son as payment.'
- Together, Good Friday and Easter mean that our sins are forgiven in Christ and that through Him we now have the victory over death and the grave.

Peter sermon in Acts: "But God raised Jesus from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen...He commanded us to preach to the people...He is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead." Acts 10:40ff

And what better way to celebrate God's victory over sin and death than to have a feast? What better way to celebrate the Lord's triumph over the grave than to dine at His Holy Table? Indeed, the Lord is good. He has risen! He is not in the grave, but here, with us in the salutary gift of the Lord's Supper.

The prophet Isaiah foretold God's victory over sin and death, as well as a celebratory feast that God Himself would prepare in heaven for all believers: **"On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.**

And He will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of His people will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken." Isaiah 25:6-8

God kept His promises and destroyed our greatest enemy of all in the death and resurrection of His Son.

- And in His rich grace, He has also given to us a feast of “rich food” in the Supper of His Son’s body and blood.
- For what can be richer, what can be more satisfying than the very bread of heaven Himself?

Martin Luther’s great Easter hymn blends together these 2 themes, the triumph of our Lord over death and the grave and the participation in that victory through Holy Communion: “Then let us feast this Easter Day on Christ, the bread of heaven; The Word of grace has purged away the old and evil leaven. Christ alone our souls will feed; He is our meat and drink indeed; Faith lives upon no other! Alleluia!” LSB 458:7

In this feast of victory, it is no imagined Jesus that we dine with. It is no mere symbol of a far distant Savior. It is the risen Christ Himself who steps into our midst and feeds us with His crucified and risen flesh and blood for the forgiveness of our sins, life and salvation.

What a marvelous antidote this is to our fear of death and judgment! What glorious comfort there is for Christians on this day. Not only do we hear the news that our Lord has defeated death, we also get to celebrate that victory by feasting on His body and blood.

Is it any wonder, therefore, that from the very beginning the Christian Church gathered on Sunday to hear the teaching of the apostles and to break bread?

After all, this is the day that God put the breath of life back into His Son for us and for our salvation. This is the day that Christ appeared to Peter and the other disciples who had been chosen by God as witnesses, “who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead” Acts 10:41

One can easily see why Easter is the chief festival of the Church Year, and why every Sunday is a minicelibration of that 1st Easter.

On the one hand, this validates and gives meaning to everything that our Lord said and did during His earthly ministry. Now there can be no doubt that His words

were true. Now there can be no doubt that He was the Son of God. Nor can there be any doubt that God has forgiven all our sins.

The resurrection validates our faith and the work of the Church.

- If the Lord is risen, then our faith is not in vain.
- There can be no doubt that Baptism truly is a washing away of our sins
- There can be no doubt or uncertainty that Holy Communion is truly a life-giving feast of forgiveness.
- There can be no doubt that the Absolution spoken in the name of the triune God is truly the word of the risen Christ sounding forth from the lips of His called servants to comfort frightened sinners.

Martin Luther said about preaching on the resurrection that it is not just “useless, inert and powerless babbling or notion” but instead is “strength and power which also works resurrection in us through faith.”

Like the women at the empty tomb, the Church is gladdened by the news that “He is not here, for He has risen, as He said” 28:6

That is perhaps the best part of Christ’s triumphant resurrection --- all doubts flee.

- All uncertainty about God
- All uncertainty about His attitude toward us
- All uncertainty about the extent of His love
- All uncertainty about the truthfulness of His promises must depart.

And for anyone who has borne heavy crosses, for anyone who has thought in moments of difficulty that God had forgotten them, or that their faith was in vain, or that their lives were utterly futile, no news is more welcome.

If we are facing death or severe illness...If we have lost wives or husbands, parents or children...if we have suffered ridicule or mockery for the sake of Christ, we do not need to despair.

For Christ is risen.

- He who the victory over death
- Crosses must be borne
- But today we rejoice that death did not have the last word for Jesus
- Nor does in for you.

We give thanks to God for preparing for us a feast of victory in the salutary gift of the Lord's Supper.

Here every time we take the Lord's Supper as the Apostle Paul says we proclaim "The Lord's death until He comes" and confess that Jesus, who was crucified, has risen.

Christ is risen! He has risen indeed!