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The Festival of the Resurrection of Our Lord (Series A)

April 16, 2017

Text: Matthew 28:1–10

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

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

There is a unifying theme that has guided me in my sermon preparation for the past 4 days of Holy Week leading into today. Divine, holy love, the love of God revealed most especially in the actions and deeds of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus loved His Church so intensely that just a few hours before He was betrayed, tried, condemned and handed over to Roman authorities, He gave to His Church the Lord's Supper. In this festive meal, Jesus gives Himself, His own body and blood, for the forgiveness of our sins. And there are no restrictions on how often we receive this royal gift of love and grace. Jesus simply said, "Do this, as often as you eat and drink in remembrance of me!" The Lord's Church can receive this gift as often as she wishes for Holy Communion is a feast of divine, holy love.

And then Jesus demonstrated His love for us sinners by dying on the cross to take away the sins of the world. No longer need we fear the damning corruption of sin. All sins are completely paid for by Jesus; we are cleansed by the blood of Jesus. No longer need we fear God's wrath against iniquity and rebellion. Jesus endured the Father's just judgment against evil. God and man are reconciled because of Jesus. No longer need we fear the tempting power of Satan and his greatest weapon, sin leading to death. The death of Jesus destroyed the power of Satan and death. For when we die physically, we live nonetheless in the presence of Jesus. God shows His love clearly and beautifully in the crucifixion of Jesus.

Last night, we considered Jesus' love for His people shown in His burial and descent into hell. All 4 gospels and I Corinthians 15 emphasize that Jesus was buried as absolute proof that Jesus died, and that for the sins of the world He loves without mixture or hypocrisy. After Jesus was buried, the Scriptures declare that Jesus, in the spirit, descended into hell in order to preach His victory to the spirits. This was no egotistic machismo gratifying some perverse need to be recognized by His defeated foes. Far from it. All that Jesus did in His incarnation, life, public ministry, and death

was motivated out of love for His people. He proclaimed the victory that is our victory; the victory achieved because of His perfect, self-giving love.

And now, we come to the greatest act of divine love revealed in human and divine history. This is Easter morning, the Sunday that we especially bask in the glorious love shining upon the universe in the resurrection of Jesus! We heard the angelic proclamation to the women looking to find a dead Jesus. “He is not here, for he has risen from the dead...” (vs. 6). How can we fully and completely explore the depths of this divine love? For it was our Lord’s love for His creation that drove Him to the cross, to the depths of hell, and then to shatter death and the grave by rising again from the dead.

Let us be absolutely clear about this one thing, saints of the living Lord. Jesus rose again, not for Himself – He is the Lord of life – but for us, for you and me and all His beloved people. Jesus died on Good Friday and burst forth from the tomb on Easter morning because He loves you and desires to share His eternal, resurrection life with you in His kingdom in perfect joy and felicity throughout the ages of ages.

The apostle Paul, in Ephesians 2:4–6, glories in the love of God revealed in the Lord’s resurrection:

⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶and raised us up with him (*that is, we share in Christ’s resurrection life*) and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus...

Christ Jesus dying and rising again in love for us and for our salvation is the comprehensive, divine act of love that changes everything. His divine love covers your life from beginning to end. Nothing happens to you outside of His steadfast, enduring love.

The resurrection of Christ is “the absolution pronounced by God Himself on all men, all sinners, the entire world, and sealed in the most glorious way. The eternal love of God reveals itself in all its wealth, overflowing fullness, and brightest splendor in Christ’s resurrection. In the resurrection we hear that God was not satisfied merely to send His Son into the world and let Him become man for us. (As glorious as Christmas is, it isn’t enough.)

Yea, “it was not enough to give His own Son into death for us. (As monumental as Good Friday is, it, by itself, isn’t enough.) No, when His Son had finished everything that he had to do and suffer in order to earn grace, life, and blessedness for us, God...because of burning love for us sinners, could not wait for us to come and beg for His grace in Christ. No, scarcely had His Son finished everything, then He hurried to give to all men the grace merited through the resurrection of His Son, to acquit them all from their sins, and before heaven and earth publicly, really, and solemnly declare them redeemed, reconciled, clean, guiltless, and righteous in Christ (C.F.W. Walther, *Gospel Sermons*, v. 1, p. 232–233). Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday need Easter; that is, Christ rising from the dead is the most absolute, perfect display of God’s love for you and for all people. His resurrection encapsulates and completes all of our Lord’s redemptive deeds.

Today’s gospel from Matthew 28 highlights our Lord’s resurrection love in a very particular way, one which is as needed today as it was on that first Easter morning. In these 10 verses, the subject of fear is mentioned. The Roman guards are afraid when the angel descends from heaven to roll away the stone from Christ’s tomb. The women are afraid because of the earthquake and the angel. Seeing their fear, the angel preached the first Easter sermon, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay” (vs. 5–6).

The angel commanded the women to go tell the disciples that Jesus is risen. They leave in haste with joy mixed with fear. And who should they meet on the way? The resurrected Jesus! “Greetings,” the Lord said to them. In the presence of the risen Lord, the women are afraid. “Do not be afraid,” Jesus says to the frightened women! “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me” (vs. 10).

Heavenly angels, even the Lord Jesus Himself, preaches the good news that His beloved people need not be afraid. Christ is risen from the dead. All dreadful enemies that would cause us fear – sin, human and demonic evil, God’s wrath, a guilty and wounded conscience, the accusing voice of God’s law – all of them are swallowed up and silenced in our dear Lord’s resurrection.

Fear cannot remain in the perfect love of Jesus. The apostle John declares this truth most glorious in his epistle (4:16b–19):

^{16b}God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. ¹⁷By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. ¹⁸There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. ¹⁹We love because he first loved us.

We are baptized children of the living Lord Jesus Christ. His perfect love – please note that it’s Christ’s perfect love, which casts out all fear. Love is perfected in us through Christ abiding in us. Our love for God is always, always, always, kindled and awakened in response to Christ’s perfect love given to us by the Holy Spirit in the preaching of the Lord’s gospel and the administration of His sacraments. This is Easter preaching saints of God. And only the Church of Jesus has this kind of message to share with the world.

We live in the resurrection love and life of the Lord Jesus Christ. All fear and doubt and uncertainty about the future are cast out because Jesus promises to come again to take us unto Himself. As He rose physically from the dead on Easter morning, so we shall rise physically from the dead on the Last Day. All believers in Christ will live, body and soul, in the glory of our Lord’s love and life.

Rejoice and be glad beloved saints of Christ. Glorious indeed in the life of grace and love given to you in the resurrected Jesus Christ!!

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

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.