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The Resurrection of Our Lord (Series C)

March 27, 2016

Text: I Corinthians 15:19–26; Luke 24:19–26

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

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

Dear saints of God, this is our morning of triumph! Jesus is risen from the dead and now lives and reigns to all eternity. Today is our day of days, the climax of our hope and aspirations for a glorious future in God's eternal kingdom. Easter Sunday is the day we especially remember and rejoice in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul devotes an entire chapter in contemplation of the Lord's resurrection. Easter changes everything. Nothing will ever be the same again. For never had anyone risen from the dead never to taste death again. This event is so important for our Christian faith and hope that, quite simply, Christianity wouldn't exist without it. Listen to what Paul says about the absolute necessity of the Christ's physical resurrection from the dead on the third day in I Corinthians 15:12–19. It's absolutely astounding in what he says, “

¹²Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. ¹⁵We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. ¹⁶For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁷And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

Without the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, Christianity falls like a house of weak, wobbly cards. Without a resurrection Jesus, we would be a miserable people indeed. That's what the apostle said in I Corinthians 15:19. If our hope and faith in Christ is good only for this life, then we are most to be pitied.

Does all this surprise you a little? I've heard a number of times that people think religion in general, and Christianity in particular, are good things if for no other reason than it instills a sense of right and wrong. In other words, religion is good because it gives you a good dose of morality.

The New Testament says that kind of thinking is a bunch of hogwash. If the best thing Jesus can give us is a bit of morality, a religious version of see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil, then we Christians are a miserable lot. Why is that? The stark reality is that morality doesn't prove very effective when facing humanity's greatest problems: sin, suffering, sorrow, and death. Or maybe to put it more concretely, see no evil, hear no evil, and speak no evil are powerless against a terminal diagnosis or tragic accidents or the evils of humanity the likes of which we saw yet again in the attacks in Brussels, Belgium, this past week. Evil laughs at a Christ-less morality devoid of the resurrection.

We get a sense of despair and hopelessness in the women who went to Jesus' tomb on that first Easter morning. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and other women went to Jesus' tomb on Easter Sunday morning with spices they had prepared in order to complete their traditional burial customs. Jesus had been brutally crucified unto death into the late evening on Friday. Jesus' disciples had to bury Him hastily so that they could get back home before the Passover Sabbath began. Being observant Jews, they could not be out of the house on the Sabbath lest they break the 4th Commandment. They just didn't have the time to take care of Jesus' body with the due respect He deserved especially after the cruelty He suffered at the hands of the Romans.

So they went to the tomb on Easter morning in order to pay their last respects. Their love for Jesus is most noble. Nobody could deny or take away from their desire to do the best they could for Jesus. But let's be honest with the Biblical teaching. They went there with no hope of ever seeing Jesus alive again. All the miracles He had performed couldn't save Jesus from a Roman cross. All His powerful teaching, including His famous Sermon on the Mount, couldn't keep Jesus from being betrayed, arrested, and crucified. Let's face it – the apostle Paul certainly does – if Jesus is only good for this life, then we are most to be pitied. If our hope is founded upon a dead Savior who could not rise from the dead and who cannot raise us from the dead, then we are a miserable bunch. The most to be pitied says Paul.

But thanks be to God! “Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (vs. 20). What the Scriptures proclaim to us today and every Sunday is that our hope in Jesus is not only good for life in this world but also in the world to come! Humanity’s greatest problems of sin, suffering, sorrow, and death have an answer in Christ that takes us beyond life on this side of eternity into a glorious future.

For on Good Friday, Jesus died to atone for all the sin, suffering, sorrow, and death of this world. His Good Friday sermon of “It is finished” gives answer to those concerns and so much more. Holy Scripture teaches us that Jesus took unto Himself all the evil of this world and He nailed it to His cross. Every little white lie, every heinous crime, every, every evil thought, everything that creates guilt and shame in your heart and mind – you name it – Jesus nailed it to His cross. He paid for humanity’s evil with His own blood.

Our Christian faith teaches us that God’s answer to evil of every form is located in the crucifixion of Jesus. So when you or others ask the big why questions: Why does God allow such things to happen? Why doesn’t God stop evil from happening? Why must people die, young or old? God’s answer is this...I took all evil, sin, suffering, and death unto Myself. I take responsibility for it all. God, in the person of Jesus Christ, is answerable for all sin. Jesus absorbs all of it. And just before He died on Good Friday, Jesus declared “It is finished.” Nothing more need be given to pay for the world’s salvation.

But if it all stopped right there, then we’d still be lost without hope. Sure, Jesus died to pay for humanity’s evil. But death would still get the final word. Is there no more? Yes. There is more, much more. Easter came. And the tomb was found empty. The Lord Jesus Christ, who gave His life on Calvary’s Cross, rose from the dead to break the power of death.

That’s why the angels in today’s gospel reading sound so surprised in their greeting to the women. “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you...” (Lk. 24:5–6). Don’t you remember? This shouldn’t surprise you and you shouldn’t be here with spices looking for a dead body. You should be here looking to find the living, resurrected Jesus. That’s what He said He’d do. Luke writes that the women remembered the Lord’s words and went back to the 11 apostles to tell them the good news. Jesus is risen from the dead!

Dear saints of God, there is no other reason why we gather together on this Easter morning or on any Sunday morning except for the fact that Christ rose from the dead. Because Jesus rose from the dead, we have the promise of forgiveness of sins in this life and the hope of our own bodily resurrection from the dead on the Last Day. Because Jesus lives, we shall live too. Death does not get the last word. The resurrection life of Jesus is the final, authoritative, victorious, conquering word.

So the apostle Paul declares,

“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead...For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ (*that’s you and me and all baptized believers in Jesus!*). Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power” (I Cor. 15:20, 22–24).

Because Jesus rose from the dead, our faith is not in vain. Our loved ones who have already died believing in Jesus have not died in vain. They rest in the peace of Jesus and we shall see them again – please hear that well, we shall see them again – on the resurrection of the Last Day. Sin, Satan, suffering, and evil have lost because Jesus rose from the dead!

Our Christian hope transcends morality in this life, though we want to live good and decent lives too. In Jesus, we are participants in the greatest victory every achieved. Even death itself is defeated, “The last enemy to be destroyed is death” says Paul in vs. 26. Not only shall we see that final victory, we shall experience it ourselves when we are raised from the dead to live and reign with Christ for all eternity.

The living, resurrected Jesus is our joy and our triumph. And we are the people who have the most cause for celebration and rejoicing.

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.