

16 April 2006
The Resurrection of our Lord

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Living in Always Easter!”

Text: Mark 16:1-8; 1 Corinthians 15:19-28; Isaiah 25:6-9

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Christ is risen.

Some of you have heard that good news for many decades now; some here are hearing it for the very first time.

Christ is risen.

It is the most important sentence in the Christian faith, without which the Christian faith would cease to be. (1 Cor 15:14)

In that sentence is joy, astonishment, wonder, awe, gratitude.

And might I add to that, *relief*.

Yes, for it means that Holy Week is over.

The rigor of Holy Week is over.

The intensity of Holy Week is over.

And while it is a deep, meaningful, and wonderful week, it is at the same time a difficult week – for mind, body, and soul.

And not just for pastors.

One never leaves Holy Week the same as entering it.

The Word of God, in both Law and Gospel, accomplishes its work, and leaves the heart changed.

And so our cries of “Christ is risen!” today means rest for our souls, because the battle is over.

Christ is risen means Christ has won.

Our sin is atoned for,

the seal of *our* graves has been broken,

and the head of our enemy, Satan, has been crushed under the heel of our brother,

Lord, and Saviour.

What more is there left to do? Nothing. Jesus has done it all.

Women, no need to go with your spices and anoint the body.

And don't worry about the stone.

Christ is risen.

Now we can rest in peace.

Easter has changed everything.

Remember the other time everything had changed?

There was only one other time, and everything changed in the opposite way.

When Adam sinned and plunged all of creation into sin.

Everything changed.

Work became sweaty toil.

Peace was replaced with fear and strife.

The rest of Paradise became the hardship of pilgrimage.

Adam was no longer at home in this world, but a stranger on earth.

And life itself was changed.

Life would now end.

There would death, tears, sorrow, separation.

All of that was never part of God's good creation.

It was the fruit of Adam's *perverse imagination*.

And instead of becoming like God, as Satan had promised – instead of ascending on high,

Adam would now descend into the dust of death.

And Satan would dance on his grave.

Everything had changed.

If you read the book or saw the movie *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Narnia was a world which had been changed.

It was winter – always winter but never Christmas.

The “winter of our sins,” as our sermon hymn (LW #141 v. 2) just called it.

Always cold,

always death,

always fear, with no joy.

It would be like, I think, always living in Holy Week, but never Easter.

Always betrayal,

always denial, always scourging,

always blood, always fear,

always despairing, always sin, always death.

Always working and never resting.

Always worrying and never comforted.

Always striving and never reaching.

Always busy and never done.

Until the body, weary and broken, can take no more.

Actually, it sounds very much like our world today, does it not?

And like our lives.

As I stand here in this pulpit today, and every week, I see people whose lives are broken with sin.

People suffering.

People saddened by separation from loved ones.

People betrayed and hurt.

People struggling under enormous burdens.

People confused and worried.

People whose bodies are wearing out.

People searching for peace and rest, in a world where it is *like always Holy Week* and never Easter.

And while the devil isn't dancing on our graves yet, he is getting his tap shoes on.

But to all of us today, broken and tired, stumbling and struggling;

on this morning of the third day since our Lord was crucified,

the angel says to us: *Christ is risen.*

It is Easter!

As we sang, ***This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.*** (Introit; Ps

118:24)

Did you hear echoes of Genesis in that verse?

Echoes of creation, *before the fall*, when everything was newly made and all was good?

Yes!

Christ is risen and has restored creation.

Christ is risen and has lifted our burdens.

Christ is risen and has buried our sins.

Christ is risen and put our hearts and souls at rest once again.

Christ is risen, and everything is changed.

Yes, everything is changed.

But not in a wistful, wishful, "Have a nice day" sort of way.

No. For with the coming of Easter, with the resurrection triumph of our Saviour Jesus, we have truly entered a new day, a new life.

The Holy Week of sin is past, for our Saviour has fulfilled it and has risen to a new day, what ancient theologians liked to call *the eighth day*.

For it is the first day of the *new* creation.

The day of eternal life, that will never end.

The day that has broken out of the old cycle.

The first day of the rest of your life,

where there will never again be a Holy Week of sin.

And so if in this world, in this time, it is like *always Holy Week but never Easter*,

because of Christ, and for those who live in Him, *it is now always Easter!*
For Christ is risen, and it was Jesus who danced on the devil!
Christ is risen, and there is rest and peace and joy.
Christ is risen, and everything is changed.

Yes, everything is changed, **for you.**

Even though you probably felt the same this morning when you woke up,
and even though you will probably feel the same tomorrow,
and even though the problems you had in your life yesterday will still be
there tomorrow.

For you have your own Easter day, when Christ's Easter became your Easter.

Your own Easter Day of rest and peace,

when everything changed for you,

when you were given the gift of faith,

when you received the atonement of Christ's cross,

when the stone on *your* grave was rolled away,

and when you began living in the day of your eternal Easter –

it is the day when you were baptized.

For on that day Jesus made you His own and joined you to Himself, and you rose with
Christ to a new life (Rom 6).

On that day you were made a new creation (2 Cor 5:17).

That day was (as we sang) *your* exodus from sin and death, through the Red Sea waters,
and into the Promised Land of Heaven.

Your exodus from the *always Holy Week of sin and death* to the joy, peace, and rest of
Easter.

And so because you are baptized, to say *Christ is risen* means you are risen too!

And that, I must say, changes everything!

Even though your resurrection is *already*, but at the same time *not yet*.

As a sinful human being you have one foot in the grave,

but as a Christian you have one foot in Paradise.

For one world you are leaving, and one you are entering.

Yes, we sometimes get them mixed-up, and in our adamic wrongheadedness, head the
wrong direction!

And so our baptism brings us back.

Back in repentance, and back into Christ through the forgiveness of your sin.

Back into Easter, to patiently await the time that is coming when we will have both feet firmly planted in Paradise.

When, as St. Paul said, ***“God will be all in all.”***

That we are not there yet, I don't have to tell you.

The trouble in the world, and the trouble in your life tell you that!

Sometimes it seems that the one foot we have in the grave is so heavy that we'll never get it out.

And actually, that's true.

If it were up to us, and our strength, we'd have both feet in the grave, and have been dead and buried a long time ago, with no hope and no way out.

But it's not up to us!

As the women at the tomb discovered, *Jesus has done it all.*

And so just as they had no need to anoint the body or roll away the stone, *neither do you.*

It is Jesus who has anointed your body as His own in baptism,

and it is He who will roll away the stone on your tomb on the last day.

Your body will be resurrected, and you will be changed.

Glorified.

Perfect.

Just as in the beginning,

to live with your God and Saviour, in Paradise, forever.

For Christ is risen.

And Christ is risen means Christ has won.

And if Christ, your brother, has won, then so have you!

And so we heard the prophet Isaiah today proclaim: ***“On this mountain the Lord of hosts . . . will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces . . .”***

Sounds like always Easter, does it not?

But I left out part of that proclamation.

Actually a rather important part.

For on that mountain,

where God is swallowing up death,

where He is wiping away tears from all faces,

where is His victory –

there is also a feast!

And not just any feast, but the feast of feasts!

The best of all feasts!

For what do those who are at rest and peace do?

They relax and celebrate and feast.

And it is the Lord of hosts who makes this feast for us.
Who serves us, in His *always Easter* kingdom and Paradise.
And what a day that will be!
When we are reunited with our loved ones who have died in Christ.

But you need not wait for that day.

It is already here!

For just as your resurrection is already and at the same time not yet,
and just as you have one foot in the grave and at the same time one foot in Paradise,
so also this feast of our Lord in a heavenly feast and at the same time a feast that is
given to us here already.

Here in our *like always Holy Week* lives.

Here to lift us out of our struggles,

forgive our sins,

and set our hearts and minds on things above.

It is the feast we will receive today, the feast at this Table,
the feast of the body and blood of our Lord.

For what richer food, what greater drink could there be than our Lord Himself?

What could be of more benefit to us?

And at this feast is not just you and I and all of us gathered here this day, but all who are
in Christ.

The angels and archangels and all the company of Heaven.

That the joy we will have *then* be already ours *now*.

A little taste of *always Easter* in our *like always Holy Week* world.

For your Saviour knows you need it.

He knows what Holy Week is like.

Some of you have feasted at this Table for decades; some here will be feasting for the
very first time.

What joy is yours! And ours!

To have our Saviour here, feeding us as both the host and the meal.

To have our Saviour here, *for Christ is not dead, but risen*.

And, might I add to that, what a *relief*.

What a relief in our hectic world and lives.

What a relief in our sorrow and pain.

What a relief from our sin and failure.

What a relief to know that all these things will pass away, never to rise.

But that when we pass away, when death comes to each of us, it will be different.

We *will* rise!

Because of today.

For Christ is risen, and everything has changed.
Christ is risen, and Christ is risen means Christ has won.
And if Christ has won then I have won.
And if Christ has won, *it is Easter*.
Always Easter.
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 steadfast in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.