

8 April 2007
The Resurrection of our Lord

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Looking For Life in All the Wrong Places?”
Text: Luke 24:1-12; 1 Corinthians 15:19-26

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

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Every time we say that, it should be with a particular gusto. Not just because it's true, but because every time we say that, we are poking the devil in the eye with the sharp stick of our confession! We are mocking the mocker!

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

He lost, and we won't let him forget it.

He lost, and is vanquished forever.

The war begun in Eden with the conquest of sin and death has now ended with the victory of resurrection and life.

The prince of this world has been hurled down, and the Prince of Life reigns immortal!

He is not here, but has risen means that sin, satan, death, and hell are finished.

Or as we just sang: “*Welcome, happy morning! Age to age shall say; Hell today is vanquished, Heaven is won today!*” (TLH #202)

That is the irrefutable truth of this long-awaited day. Discovered first by the faithful women who went to the tomb that morning. They had a job to do, or so they thought. Burial obligations to keep. Though tired and weary from the events that had taken place, and from the preparation of the burial spices, they went to the tomb in *the deep early morning*. Much had happened, but life had to go on. . . .

Yes, ladies, that's exactly right! *Life had to go on!* Which is what they found when

they got to the tomb – not death, but life! Life that had to go on because sin had been atoned for by Christ on the cross, and if no sin, then no death; and if no death, then no grave; and if no grave . . . then life! Victorious life! And so the wonderful question of the angels, sent to preach the resurrection to those faithful women who *thought* they had a job to do, but found that it had already been done for them: *Why do you seek the living among the dead?*

Isn't that a great line? *Why do you seek the living among the dead!* It says it all. I think I want that on my gravestone. Because it announces a whole new reality – that we cannot find our life in this world of death.

So why do we keep trying? Why do we keep looking for life in all the wrong places? In the things of this world that do not last? In the things of this world that leave us, decay, and die?

Well, there are two reasons, I think. **First**, because even though satan lost, he's got a really big mouth. And so he is always trying to convince us *that death is all you got*; it's all you can count on. How does the old saying go? **There's only two things you can count on: death and taxes!** For look around, and what do you see? Death, right?

When we're little, we get our first tastes of death when our pets die, and then (maybe) when a grandparent dies. And we feel its sting.

When we get a little older, death seems to expand its reach into other areas of our lives, as careers die, hopes and dreams die, marriages die.

Pretty soon we're so used to death that we even attribute death to objects that were never alive in the first place! We say that our cars die, and our computers and electronics and appliances die.

And have you noticed that even lifetime warranties aren't really for a lifetime? They last only for the *expected lifetime* of the product before – *you guessed it* – it dies.

Then there's the neighborhood trash heap in front of my house every Tuesday and Friday. Which really pales in comparison to the grisly trash heap of humanity outside abortion clinics.

I could keep going, but you get the point. We're steeped in a world of death. *It's what we know.* Which brings us to the **second** reason why we **keep looking for life in**

all the wrong places – *we don't know where else to look*. And so we try to bring life out of death by making the most of what we got.

We try to *resurrect* our careers and cars and marriages.

We try to ward off death with exercise and medicine.

We deny death by trying to keep the memory of a lived one alive.

But none of it works. And we either wind up like the women who went to the tomb that morning, filled with sadness, confusion, and fear . . . or like the apostles who thought the good news of life was just an *idle tale*, or wishful thinking.

And then, worst of all, so surrounded by death and our own failure at life, some stop seeing death as the catastrophe it is – *as the very anti-creation* – and start seeing it as a friend, as a release, or escape; that death itself is the answer to death. Kind of fulfilling another old saying: **If you can't beat 'em, join 'em**. And so people, dying for life, are instead just dying. And with this deception, though he lost, satan is at least trying to make Jesus' victory a *hollow* victory.

But it is the preaching of the resurrection by the angels today that brings us out of that earthly, deathly stupor. The Word of God acting like a spiritual defibrillator, bringing us back to life with that simple, but amazingly profound, question: *Why do you seek the living among the dead?*

For *Christ is risen!* And *that* changes everything! For there *is* life in this world of death. Life *now*. **Life in Christ**.

For the resurrection is not just **an historic event** that happened some 2,000 years ago that we are commemorating today.

And it's not just **a future event** that will happen when graves will again be empty at the end of the world, that we are anticipating today.

For while both of those are *true*, that leaves a lot of time in-between; a lot of time to make it through this world and life, *here and now*. The deal with the problems and struggles and all kinds of death that we are facing *now*. And if Easter is just past and future, then for many people it is *irrelevant*. And they wind up looking for life in other places . . . places where it can't be found.

But in the midst of the darkness of this world and the shadow of death, a light has

shined to scatter the darkness of sin and death. For while we were looking for life in all the wrong places, the Life came to us! Did you ever notice that about all the Easter stories? **No one ever finds Jesus – it is always Jesus who comes to us!** And when He comes, He brings life. Life from the dead. Life for the women. Life for the apostles. And life for us.

And that means that Easter is not just history or what we call *eschatology* – end of the world stuff. **Easter is where Christ is!** For He is the resurrection and the life (Jn 11:25), and so where He is, life is as well. Real life. Everlasting life.

So where is He? Well, not in the tomb! As the women found out. He is, rather, where He promised He would be. That was the message of the angels to the women. *Remember what He said!* Don't go by what you think, or your own instincts, or what makes sense to you – *remember what He said!* Don't go looking for life in all the wrong places – *remember what he said!* For He said He would be betrayed and crucified and would die. But *remember what He said: "And on the third day rise!"* And so *He is not here, He is risen as He said!*

And they remembered His words.

So us too, dear brothers and sisters in Christ! Let us remember what He has said to us, and where He has promised to be for us. *Here and now.* For He is here, now! Christ still coming to us, and bringing life to us. Bring past, present, and future altogether in this place, in Him.

For here, in **Holy Baptism**, *He comes to us.* For when we are baptized we are not just washed, but changed. Jesus comes and takes us back in time, and joins us to Himself in His death and resurrection, that as He rose, we too rise to a new life in Him. And yet He also takes us to the future, for in baptism the gates of Heaven and eternal life are opened to us with the forgiveness of our sins.

But also in **Holy Gospel** *He comes to us.* For as the Word of God is spoken to us here, it is as if we are taken back in time and are hearing it from His own mouth. His Word, for all people in all times and in all places! Or how do we confess that in the Small Catechism? . . . *this is just as valid and certain as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself!* (Small Catechism, The Office of the Keys) And the Word of forgiveness and life

that we hear *here*, from His mouth, is the same that we will hear *there*, in Heaven, at the end.

And then also in **Holy Communion** *He comes to us*. For when we eat and drink here we are not just eating bread and wine, but our Lord comes and brings His very body and blood from the cross here to us today, giving us the forgiveness He won on the cross. And yet He also takes us to the future, as we know that this feast here is only a foretaste of the feast to come! The feast of life that we will enjoy in His kingdom forever!

And so if Easter is where Jesus comes and brings life, **then Easter is here!** And so life is here, in Christ. *For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.* (Small Catechism, Lord's Supper) **Where there is forgiveness of sins, there is resurrection. His, and ours!**

And we no longer *seek the living among the dead*, for the Living One has found us who are dead, and made us alive with Him! Alive to live a new life.

A new life with purpose and meaning.

A new life without fear and anxiety.

A new life no longer blinded by sin and death,

but alive to see the hand of God at work in the things of this world.

Graciously giving, and caring, and rescuing.

So that not even death can separate us from our loved ones any longer.

A new life, already here and now. That so many are looking for. Hungering and thirsting for. That so many need. Here. In Christ. The Living One.

Before I became a pastor, a friend of mine that I worked with had little proverb he like to say to people who were too full of themselves: *the cemetery is full of people the world couldn't live without.*

Well today, we who are full of sin and death, remember that there is only One person we can't live without. **And He's not in the cemetery!**

For *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 passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.