

23 March 2008  
The Feast of the Resurrection

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

“He Sat On It!”

Text: Matthew 28:1-10 (Jeremiah 31:1-6; Colossians 3:1-4)

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

Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!]

*An angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.* That's what St. Matthew tells us. *The angel sat on it!* It seems like such an insignificant little detail in such a tremendous story. But with those words we see that all the strength and might of man in sealing the tomb and posting a guard and making it as secure as they knew how (Mt 27:65-66), *was reduced to a chair.* How right the psalmist was when against all the plotting and raging of man, he simply states: *He who sits in the heavens, shall laugh.* (Ps 2:4) And today we can add, *He who laid in the tomb shall laugh!* For Christ is risen! No stone could hold in the Lord of life.

For what is a stone – no matter how big – against the One who took upon Himself the crushing weight of the sin of the world? What is a stone against the One who came to do battle against Satan and his minions? It is unbelief that says a stone can hold God in a tomb. But when sin is atoned for death loses its power and the grave must give up its prey. And so today our cry of **Christ is risen!** means that sin is forgiven. **Christ is risen!** means Satan is now a toothless foe. **Christ is risen!** means death is defeated, and that just as Christ is risen, so too we will rise to live with Him forever. For **Christ is risen!** means Jesus, our Saviour, has won!

And so of course the angel sits on the stone. For as we just sang: *The Strife is Over, the Battle Done.* (LSB #464) There is no more fighting to do. Now there is rest and peace and joy.

But something else happened on that stone that first Easter morning. Not only did it become a chair, *it also became a pulpit.* It is the place where the first Easter sermon ever was proclaimed, as the angel told the women that Jesus had *risen from the dead.*

And then showed them. For the angel rolled back the stone not to provide a way of escape for the Lord, but to show the world that the Lord had already risen. He rolled it back to help his fellow servants believe. He rolled it back for the sake of faith, that the women, the disciples, and all the world might believe. That we know that Jesus' resurrection was no mere spiritual resurrection, but that Jesus was wholly and fully alive. Not just part of Him, but all of Him. Body *and* soul. Anything less would not have been a victory, or even a *partial* victory, but no victory at all. Anything less would have meant that death had not been defeated, but had won after all. And if death is not defeated, then sin is not defeated. And if sin is not defeated, then we are still in our sin. And if we are still in our sin, then we have no hope (1 Cor 15:14), and Easter is not the most joyous, but the saddest, day of the year.

*But the angel is sitting on the stone!* The grave is not only open, it is empty. And the angel opens his mouth to proclaim this good news. For regarding the life of Christ, do not angels always bring good news? Christ is conceived, Christ is born, **Christ is risen!**

And that is the cornerstone of all Christian preaching. For the stone upon which the angel sat is not only his pulpit, but the pulpit from which *all* pastors preach. For without the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Christian religion is just like any other religion in this world - a religion of moralism, intellectualism, or mysticism. A religion of what we can do for God, or what we can do to get to God.

But that is not the preaching of the angel! For the angel has told us that God has come to us in the person of Jesus Christ. The angel tells us what God has done for us in Jesus' death and resurrection. The angel tells us the good news that our forgiveness, life, and salvation is not dependent upon us, but has been accomplished by our Saviour, and is given to us. Given to us by our Saviour who is not dead, but risen and living, and still coming to us - like to His disciples then - to dispel our doubts, calm our fears, and forgive our sins.

And so *of course* the angel sits on the stone, for Christ is our cornerstone. The rock on which the Church is built.

And this is what the prophet Jeremiah also proclaimed to the people of Israel and Judah, even some 600 years before Jesus was born. For even then, the preaching of what God had promised to do for His people in their *coming* Saviour was the cornerstone of all prophetic preaching. And so from Jeremiah we heard this

morning: “Thus says the Lord: . . . I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you. Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel.”

Those are important words – for Israel then, and for us today. For when Jeremiah spoke those words, God was about to punish His people for their sin; for their idolatry. The Babylonian army was at the doorstep, and they would soon completely conquer God’s people, destroy their land and their cities, and haul most of them off as prisoners of war to Babylon. And there they would remain, weeping and mourning, for 70 years. **It is a picture not unlike Good Friday**, when because of the sin of His people, Jesus is besieged by His enemies, slain on the cross, dies, and is laid captive to death in the tomb. And there was weeping and mourning.

But Jeremiah then proclaims words of comfort and promise! That God would destroy, in order to make alive. That though the nation would die, God loves His people with an everlasting love, will remain faithful to them, and bring them back *alive!* He will again raise them up and build them up . . . and then the most *astonishing* word of all: He calls His people “O *virgin Israel.*” Israel, who had committed spiritual adultery against her God. Israel, who had prostituted herself with many and various gods. Israel, who was anything but a virgin – is called by her God a virgin again. She is forgiven! And not only forgiven, but restored. It is as if her sin had never taken place at all!

For that’s what forgiveness is, and that is what our God has done for us this day, this Easter Day, with the resurrection of Jesus. For He who was slain for our sin on the cross is raised and made alive again, and in Him, God is bringing back all His people. He is building us up as His new Israel, His Church, in His everlasting love and faithfulness. And risen and living, He now comes to us too with this most *astonishing* word of all: **I forgive you all your sin.** For us who are unfaithful. For us who turn to our own ways. For us who in our sin are anything but pure – now in Christ our sin, our regrets, our pasts that haunt us, are gone! And we are as virgins in our purity again. Washed clean and restored, as if our sin had never happened at all!

And so *of course* the angle sits on the stone. That is what Easter is all about. Resting on the cornerstone of the completed work of our Saviour. Relying not on ourselves, but on Him as the source of our joy, our proclamation, and our strength.

You know, the women who went to the tomb that first Easter morning had a pretty big obstacle to face. No, not the stone, or death, or the grave! That had all been taken care of for them, by Jesus, just as He had promised. **Their obstacle was their unbelief.** What they needed was faith. And so it is for you and me. What stones are holding you down, holding you in, holding you back? What stones are causing you sadness and struggle and fear? What stones seem insurmountable? Is your problem the stones, or unbelief? Do we need strength, or do we need faith? Is the problem our Saviour, or our failure to believe His promises?

Today *the angel sits on the stone* and proclaims to us: **Christ is risen!** Whatever you need has been provided; whatever you fear has been defeated. Christ is risen, and you are risen with Him. Joined to Him in His death and resurrection in Holy Baptism. And because He lives, you live as well. His victory is your victory.

And that is a victory proclaimed not only by the angel, but also by Jesus Himself, who came to the women in their fear and joy, so that they fell down before Him in worship and threw their arms around His feet, not wanting to let go. And yet again, so it is today for you as well. For you who have not only heard the proclamation of the angel, but you for whom Christ comes today in His very same body and blood, that you take hold of Him here, eating His body and drinking His blood. Receiving from the Lord Himself the joy of forgiveness, the strengthening of your faith, and the promise of life. For He knows that is what you need. And as often as we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim His victory over death, we celebrate His triumph, and we mock the old, evil foe. For he could not stop Jesus then, and he still cannot stop him today. **The Strife is Over, the Battle Done!**

So let us too rejoice this Easter day! Let us too sit on His stone, and laugh with holy joy! 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.