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The Resurrection of our Lord

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Vienna, VA

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“Christ is Risen! That’s it!”

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

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

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

Christ is risen. That seems like such a small thing to say in the midst of a world and life that can be most difficult.

Christ is risen seems so small when we watch a wall of water wash up over Japan and carry off so many lives.

Christ is risen seems so small when we watch floods in North Dakota, tornadoes in the south, and revolutions all over the world wreak havoc and do their damage.

Christ is risen seems so small when we watch the body of a loved one being lowered into a grave and covered with dirt.

Christ is risen seems so small against all the evil we see in our world, all the hatred, all the bad news that never seems to stop.

Christ is risen seems so small as we watch our own bodies and their inexorable march to death, whether than comes for you in old age, by accident or violence, or from disease.

Christ is risen. Is that all the church has to say?

Well, yes! And that is enough. Because those are no mere words, but words that express the truth that on this day, in Christ, everything has changed. That though sin and evil oppress us, that though the devil roar and bear his teeth at us, and though the grave opens wide its mouth to swallow us up - these have all been defeated! Sin, satan, death, and hell all did their worst to Christ, *and lost*. And because Christ won, so do we.

This is the message the angel was given to proclaim to the women. This is the message the women were given to proclaim to the disciples. This is the message the

apostles were given to proclaim. And this is the message we are given to proclaim - in every time, in every place, in every circumstance of life. ***Christ is risen!*** For it is the message no one else has. It is the hope no one else has.

The world, without Christ, cannot handle death. It has no words to say. Therefore, many try to ignore death, or wish it away. Many turn to medicine to look for a cure, others try to turn it into a friend. And when all else fails, we try to dress it up with fancy caskets, make-up, loads of flowers, and pious sounding platitudes. But the 800 pound elephant is still in the room! And it is monstrous and threatening.

The church does none of these things. Instead, we look death and hell straight in the face and say: *Christ is risen!* And you, O death, are defeated. *Christ is risen!* And you, O satan, are a toothless foe. *Christ is risen!* And you, O grave, are just our resting place. For as with Jesus, so for us. On the last day, your jaws will be forced to open and release our bodies. He is raised, and so we will be raised.

So rest well, we say to those who die in Christ. Rest well, until our Lord comes again and finishes His victory, and ***we appear with Him in glory.*** For *Christ is risen.*

As St. Paul said (1 Cor 15:14-19), this is the truth on which the Christian faith depends. If Christ did not rise, if His body is still in some tomb somewhere, our faith is dead. Oh, we could still piece together some interesting ideas about God and men, about man's being and his obligation, and create some kind of religious worldview - like all the other religions of the world. But the Christian faith would be dead. Jesus would be a failed religious leader; a Saviour of no one.

For only if Jesus is risen is there something that has changed the world and the situation of mankind. Only then is He a Saviour on which we can rely. For though He was not the first to rise from the dead, His resurrection was different. Others, we are told in the Scriptures, were resuscitated from death - the widow of Zeraphath's son (1 Kings 17:17-24), the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17), the daughter of Jairus (Mark 5:22-24, 35-43), and Lazarus (John 11:1-44), as we heard two weeks ago, to name a few. These people all returned to their normal lives and then died again.

But Jesus was not merely resuscitated, but *resurrected*, and now no longer subject to death. He did not just come back from death, but defeated death. The Spirit that gave life to all things in the beginning now gives life to His body - and thus begins a new reality, a new creation, a new dimension of human existence, and a new future for us. Not the same old life dressed up in a new way, but a new life that will never end. A new life where the grave will provide a temporary resting place for our bodies, but no more than that. Christ in His death and resurrection has transformed it from a place of horror to a bed, from which He will call us from the sleep of death to eternal life. For *Christ is risen!* And we too will rise.

This is what we confess in the baptismal Creed, when we say: *I believe in the resurrection of the body*. Whose body? Christ's? Yours? Yes! For Christ's resurrection *is* your resurrection. For He took your humanity to redeem it, to raise it. When He rose from the dead, it wasn't for Himself - it was for you. And in Holy Baptism you were joined with Him in His death and resurrection. *Therefore, today is not just a remembrance of the past, but a glimpse of the future*. Your future and mine. A future that has, in fact, already begun.

For Jesus didn't just come to save your soul, as so many are wont to say these days. As if whether Jesus actually rose physically or not really doesn't matter! That is a satanic lie; nothing could be further from the truth. If Jesus' body did not rise from the dead then death won, and we lost. A mere spiritual resurrection means nothing, for you are not a mere spirit. You are a person, made up of a body and a spirit. You cannot be you if you're not both. A body without a spirit is an animal. A spirit without a body is an angel. You are neither. You are a man or a woman, a special creation of God, the crown of His creation. And He came to save not part of you, but all of you! That you live with Him forever.

And you will! For *Christ is risen!* Yes, He is risen indeed. And so, too, will you rise.

But as I said, it is a resurrection already begun in you, in your Baptism, in the forgiveness of your sin. You are already being made new. How new? How so? Listen to what we heard from Jeremiah earlier: ***"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!"***

Now, to call Israel a virgin is quite a stretch by Jeremiah! For thirty chapters before this, he has called Israel *everything but* a pure and holy virgin. For, in fact, she had committed spiritual adultery against her God with every false god she could find! But now, suddenly, something is different. Jeremiah speaks of a new reality, something so radical that Israel can be restored from a whore to a virgin. And that something new is the forgiveness God will accomplish through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Or as Jeremiah would write a few verses later in this chapter: ***"For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."***

That's a remarkable statement! And it is a promise not only for Israel, but also for you. That you live a new life even now. A life restored in the forgiveness of your sins. No matter how many, no matter how great. If *Israel* can be restored as a pure and holy virgin Bride of Christ, so can you! And you are. You heard it again today, in fact, as you hear it every Sunday: *I forgive you all your sins*. That's not me, but the voice of your Saviour. The same voice that will call your body from the grave on the last day. What He speaks now, He will speak then. What He promises now, He will

do then. For *Christ is risen!* And so will you be.

So as we heard from St. Paul this morning: ***“If then you have been raised with Christ,”*** - and you have! - ***“seek the things that are above . . . Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”***

That’s one of the reasons why, in our Communion liturgy, I say: *Lift up your hearts!* and you respond: *We lift them to the Lord.* Whatever is dragging us down in this world and life, whatever sins oppress us from without or weigh heavily upon us from within, whatever doubts and fears are robbing us of this life - not here! Not here at this altar, where Christ now comes in His resurrected Body and Blood, with His forgiveness, life, and salvation. Here, we set our minds on things above, that we may live here below. That we may live in our callings. That we may live as new creations. For truly we are! How could we not be? For when we eat the Body and drink the Blood of Christ, we do not make this food into what we are - this food makes us into what it is. We are transformed into the image of Christ. Transformed even here and now to live a new life. Until ***when Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.***

And so an old pastor, as he lay dying, said: *If Christ is risen, then nothing else matters; and if he is not risen, then nothing else matters.*

And so as we proclaim today *Christ is risen*, we are saying no small thing. We are proclaiming, in fact, the event that changed everything. And from this small proclamation, first spoken by an angel, then by the women, then by the apostles, then by the church for some 2,000 years now - from this small, easily overlooked proclamation, has come a new beginning. The new beginning for which the world was silently waiting. A reality so powerful that not even the gates of hell can stand against these words: *Christ is risen!*

Yes, that is *all* the church has to say! The sum and substance of our proclamation. That is our good news today and everyday, and that makes a difference today and everyday. Come what may, Christ is risen! [*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*] 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.