

31 March 2013
The Resurrection of our Lord

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Death Overcome”

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:19-26; Isaiah 65:17-25; Luke 24:1-12

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

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

We heard from St. Paul this morning: ***by a man came death.***

Our world knows this well. Too well. That is a phrase we are hearing far too often these days. The latest man by whom came death was Adam Lanza in Newtown, CT. Before him was James Holmes in Aurora, CO. Before him was Nidal Hasan in Ft. Hood, TX. Before him was John Allen Muhammed and Lee Boyd Malvo, the snipers in our area. Before them was Osama bin Laden. And those are just some of the names of more recent vintage. If you're a little older you remember names like Jim Jones, Jeffrey Dahmer, and Ted Bundy. Before them Adolph Hitler. And the list could go on and on. Names that we know, that still induce thoughts of horror and chills down our spines, and names that we don't know, like those who strap explosives to their bodies and blow themselves, and as many other people as possible, up.

By a man came death.

But could St. Paul have been thinking of men like them? Could he have known? Well, yes. They lived then, too. Only the names then were Herod, Nero, Claudius, Diocletian. Men by whom came death by the torture of crucifixion, the jaws of hungry beasts, consuming flames of fire, or the executioners sword. Of course, Paul in this verse was speaking of a man who came before all those men, namely Adam - the man through whom death came to all, even to himself. But while Adam is dead, his spawn live on. And so death is still raging in our world.

And even if you haven't been directly, personally effected by one of those names I mentioned, still that old Adam is claiming victims and adding to his tally. The mothers and fathers, husbands and wives, children and friends that have been taken from us, who no longer sit next to us in the pew, or with us at the dining room table, who we can no longer (or never could!) hear or touch or hug.

By a man came death. We know it all too well. And how it hurts. A hole that is

never filled, an ache that never quite goes away. We honor those taken from us. I think of places like Arlington National Cemetery with its row upon row of tombstones placed precisely the same distance apart, with the respect and honor given each and every person laid to rest there. With all the flags on Memorial Day, and all the wreaths on Christmas. But no matter how much honor is there, *it's still a cemetery*. A place of death and separation.

By man came death. Yes, a truth we know too well.

But St. Paul then continues with the good news! ***By a man has come also the resurrection of the dead!*** And that is the truth, the good news, that is proclaimed today. That someone has broken the grip of death and the grave for us. That *Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!* That death has finally met its match. The death that overwhelms and captures us and our loved ones has itself been overwhelmed and taken captive by the man who came to take our place - the God-man, our Saviour Jesus Christ. And not just Him. He is ***the fruit of those who have fallen asleep***, St. Paul said. The first of *many* resurrections. For all who have died in Christ have really only fallen asleep, we are assured. Christ will come and awaken them to life again. To a life that will never end. To a life that death has no power over.

By a man has come also the resurrection of the dead!

The great apologist CS Lewis (in *Mere Christianity*) put it this way: he wrote that Jesus, through His death and resurrection, has “disabled” death. Or in other words, when death swallowed Jesus, it was like pouring sugar into the gas tank of a car. The car is still there, the engine is still there, but it doesn't work anymore; it is disabled. *Now, in Christ, that is how death is for us.* Death is still here, people still die and are buried in our cemeteries and we still have sorrow and sadness at their being taken from us - but death is now “disabled.” Its power is gone. For with His resurrection, Jesus has stripped its power, broken its grip, and changed it - from a final termination to a temporary sleep. Until at His coming ***those who belong to Christ shall all be made alive.***

By a man has come also the resurrection of the dead!

And that victory was given to you when you were baptized into the one who rose from the dead. Born first a spawn of Adam into death, in Holy Baptism you are *reborn* a child of God into life. Holy Baptism joins you to Jesus in His death, so that you will also be united with Him in His resurrection (Romans 6). A physical resurrection just like His physical resurrection, on the last day. But already now, too, a spiritual resurrection; a resurrection set free from sin, death, and devil to live a new life. A new life not in fear, but in faith; not in sadness, but in joy; not alone, but in the fellowship of Christ and His Church. The fellowship of those who do not

have to live a frenzied life before time runs out, but who live now knowing that that we are living a life that will not end.

This is the new life that Isaiah wrote about, that we heard earlier. ***For behold, I create a new heavens and a new earth.*** That sounds good! For this old one's not getting any better, is it? ***And the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind.*** That sounds even better! All the pain and sorrow, the separation and death, will not be remembered. ***No more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress.*** Yes! No more sobbing in hospital rooms, or at funerals. ***No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days.*** Again, yes! No more will our loved ones be snatched away from us; no more one-man-death crusades. ***They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, says the Lord.***

That is what Jesus has accomplished this day in His resurrection. We're not there yet, obviously. But it is accomplished. *It is finished*, Jesus said from the cross (John 19:30). And that day is coming. As surely as Jesus is risen from the dead, so the day of our resurrection is coming, and the beginning of the new creation. Or: ***as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.***

Sadly, though, while the first part of that is well-known - too well-known - in our world today (the death part); the second part (the resurrection part) is not. There are many people who are still living and acting like those women who went to the tomb that first Easter morning, taking with them spices to anoint the dead. Many awake the next morning, and the morning after that, not knowing of the resurrection. Thinking this is the end. Maybe we even get stuck there from time to time, satan trying to deceive us and take our eyes off the cross of Christ and His empty tomb to look at the grave and believe in its finality.

So to them - to us! - the message of the angel needs to be proclaimed again: *No! He is not here, but has risen!* There is no body, the tomb is empty. There is no death here, only life. ***And they marveled.*** How could they not? They had seen Jesus on the cross. They had seen death do its worst. They had seen not just one, but all the old Adams of all history, bring death to this one man through their sin. Just think of all the havoc wreaked by one man on a death crusade; now think of all that, together, and more, heaped on Jesus on the cross. Truly, that would be a death no one could overcome, right?

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For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.

Well, it would have been a death no man could overcome, had that been just an

ordinary man on the cross. But that was the God-man, *God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God*, made man. Our Saviour Jesus Christ. And by taking all our sin and death, He swallowed up all our sin and death, and disabled it, once and for all, now and forever. Or, to put it in the words of the Introit we sang earlier: ***I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.*** That was originally written about Pharaoh and his army when they pursued the people of Israel to the Red Sea, but it is also - and ultimately - about *satan and the war horse named death that he rides on*. But though he pursue us, he has been thrown into the sea, the sea of our baptism. For through the death and resurrection of Jesus, given to us in baptism, our ***Lord has triumphed gloriously.*** And so ***the Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.***

And so the Church proclaims this victory today - to us and to all the world! That all may have this faith and this hope. This faith and hope that makes all the difference in the world. This faith and hope that enable us to live in joy, no matter what this world and its prince may throw at us. He did not win. He cannot win. And He will not win. ***By a man came death, but by Jesus has come also the resurrection of the dead.***

And while we are not on our Lord's holy mountain yet; while we are not yet in the place and time of peace and joy when sorrows are no more, *our Lord has brought His holy mountain here to us*. To give us a foretaste of that victory; a down payment of the resurrection as He gives us His resurrected and living Body and Blood in His Supper. And as He lives in us and we in Him, as He gives us His forgiveness and salvation, we have begun - already now - to live that life which will never end. And so, as you hear, when we gather at this table, it is with *the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven* - or in other words, the holy mountain come to us. Our Lord and Saviour come to us, until that day of the *full* harvest, when we will finally be with Him.

By a man came death. Yes, we know it all too well. ***But by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.*** May we know this better and better each and every day. That *The Strife is Over, the Battle Done! Now is the victor's triumph won; Now be the song of praise begun: Alleluia!* (LSB #464) For 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.