

Jesu Juva

“From Despair to Joy”

Text: Exodus 15:1-18; Luke 24:13-35

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

The reading from Exodus that we just heard is the song of joy sung by the nation of Israel after the Lord led them safely through the Red Sea.

Mere hours before, they had been camped on the western shore of the Red Sea, and they were in despair. For on that shore was Egypt. And not just Egypt, MAD Egypt! Pharaoh had had a change of heart about letting them go, and pursued the people of Israel with his chariots and horses and the best of his soldiers. So Israel was frightened and in despair. What would happen now? Would they be slaughtered? Would they be taken back to Egypt and made subject to an even harsher slavery? That time on the western shore of the Red Sea was an uncertain and desperate time.

But then they watched with amazement as Moses stretched forth God’s staff over the waters and they miraculously parted, allowing Israel to cross the Red Sea on dry ground. And then once they had crossed, they watched with equal wonder and awe as God closed those waters back up while the Egyptian forces were still crossing, swallowing them up and drowning them. And suddenly, there on the eastern shore, there was nothing but rejoicing and exaltation in their God. What had looked hopeless and like sure defeat, God turned into a great victory and deliverance.

And that is the story of Easter. That the cross which looked hopeless and like sure and utter defeat, God turned into a great victory and deliverance. Delivering us not from the Egyptians, but from a pursuing army far worse - the forces of sin, death, grave, and hell, seeking to enslave and devour us.

But for those two disciples walking back to Emmaus that Easter Sunday night, they were still on the western shore, in despair. For the image of Jesus arrested and bound, of Jesus mocked and whipped, of Jesus strung up on the cross, of Jesus dead and his lifeless body buried, had been seared into their minds. Kind of like that song you hear that sticks in your head and no matter how much you want to get it out, you can’t - that image of the dead Jesus was in their minds, and they couldn’t get it out. There on the western shore, the enemy had won. Death had won. ***We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.*** But all we see is that Pilate, the Jews, and the grave have won. And all is lost.

So Jesus comes to them. He doesn’t let them recognize Him at first. He wants to lead them through the Sea, as it were, from despair to hope, a hope based on the Word and promises of God. And so, Luke tells us, ***beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he***

interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. Jesus teaches them that things had not gone horribly wrong, as it looked and as they thought, but that this was God's plan all along. He teaches them that the cross is not a place of defeat, but victory, He teaches them that God is greater than their fear and despair, and to put their confidence and trust not in what we see, feel, or think, but in the Word and promises of God alone. That alone is our infallible guide. And as they listened and learned, they say later, *their hearts burned within them.* Burned with the fire of faith and hope, enkindled by the Word of God and the Spirit that works through that Word.

And then Jesus has one more surprise for them - He opens their eyes and allows them to see who He really is. That though they did not know it, Jesus had been there with them all along. And He would continue to be with them, now and forever, *in the breaking of the bread*, which is Luke's name for the Lord's Supper. And right at that moment, those two disciples had arrived on the eastern shore. They crossed over from death to life, from despair to hope, from doubt to faith, from sadness to joy. And I wouldn't be surprised if they sang the Song of Moses and Israel from Exodus all the way back to Jerusalem. For they knew that Christ was risen! He had won.

And that is the source of our joy as well. How often we are like those two disciples, like Israel on the western shore. We look around and all we see is doom and gloom. Problems, troubles, pains. Our friends betray us and sin against us, nothing seems to be going right, all I get is grief. My own sins won't leave me alone and Jesus sometimes seems a million miles away.

But our God specializes in turning defeat into victory, into taking us through our seas of trouble to the shore of triumph and rejoicing. That is what Easter is all about. That in Jesus, we have been delivered from all that threatens us. Our sins have been forgiven, our graves have been opened, our death has been defeated, hell has been invaded, and satan has been crushed. All by Jesus in His death and resurrection. And if that's true - and it is! - then what can man do to me? What do I need fear? Why do I despair? *The Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.* For Christ is risen! He has won. And for you, His baptized and beloved child, there is nothing He won't do for your good.

Maybe, though, like those two disciples, He'll keep your eyes closed for a while and prevent you from seeing, so He can teach you and strengthen your faith. But if He does, joy comes in the end, when He enables you to see. When you look back and see that even in your most fearful and desperate times, you had nothing to fear and He had been with you all along.

And if you're not in that situation, maybe you are one who can hurry back to Jerusalem and help those who still are. Take the message of Jesus' victory over all our enemies to those still on the western shore, still stuck in sin and despair, and given them hope. Speak God's Word and promises to them, and point them to their Saviour. Don't worry if you

don't see results - that's not your job. The Word does its work. The Spirit enkindles faith and makes hearts burn. You just take your joy to them and show them life on the eastern shore - the joy of our Lord's salvation. The joy of living in His promises. The confidence that we have in Him.

For that is what Easter is all about, long after the bunnies and baskets have been put away and the candy eaten. For still Jesus is revealing Himself to us in the breaking of the bread, in His Supper, and giving us His Body and Blood for the forgiveness of our sins. And He won't stop, until He leads us through this life to the shore of the next, His heavenly kingdom, the promised land with the feast that has no end.

So as we sang earlier:

*Let us give praise to Him with endless joy;
Death's fearful sting He has come to destroy.
Our sin forgiving, alleluia!
Jesus is living, alleluia!* (LSB #466, refrain)

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.