

Today we celebrate the festival of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus. He is risen. He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Now, since we are celebrating the resurrection of Jesus, you would think that our epistle lesson would say something about Jesus being raised from the dead. Instead, we hear St. Paul's words from 1st Corinthians 5 in which he tells us to swallow our pride and celebrate the festival of Christ's death. This is what he calls the Lord's Supper. Christ, who is our Passover Lamb, was sacrificed. This is what Paul teaches us to observe. Earlier in this same epistle, Paul says, "We preach a Crucified Christ. (1 Cor 1:23)" And again he says, "While I was with you, I was determined to know only Jesus Christ and Him crucified." Then later in his epistle, when he again addresses the Lord's Supper in which Jesus gives us his body and blood to eat and to drink, Paul says, "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Cor 11:26)" Here we are on Easter Sunday, the day of our Lord's resurrection from the dead. And we are told to celebrate the fact that our Passover Lamb was sacrificed. We still dwell on Christ crucified. Why is this?

This is because the resurrection of our Lord Jesus declares Jesus to be the Crucified One. You see, Jesus' death was not an accident. Jesus himself says in the last chapter of Luke's Gospel that it was necessary for the Scriptures to be fulfilled, that the Son of Man would be handed over and crucified and then rise again on the last day. Our Lord's crucifixion was foretold by the Scriptures. He himself foretold his crucifixion and resurrection several times to his disciples. And his resurrection proves that his crucifixion accomplished what it was meant to accomplish. He is the Lamb of God who truly did take away the sin of the world. God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself and not counting their sins against them. By this one man's obedience, righteousness and life have come to all men. As Jesus said on the cross, "It is finished." So in his resurrection, he emerges as Christ the Crucified. In other words, his sacrifice for our sins does not remain some distant event in the past. His resurrection is not a call for us to move on and leave his crucifixion behind. No, when we say, "He is risen indeed!" we are declaring that he isn't just some guy who died on the cross. We are declaring that he is the Crucified One, whose shed blood still sets us free from sin and condemnation. His obedience, suffering, and death still avail before the throne of God, covering up our sins, and declaring us righteous.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the staple and seal that this Jesus, who was crucified, is the Lord and Christ, the anointed one of God, whose shed blood and pierced body continues to give us life from heaven. What sins continue to bother you? What is weighing on your conscience this morning? Perhaps you realize that you haven't been faithful in hearing and learning God's Word. Perhaps you have been angry with your brother in Christ. Or you see your own death coming, and you are afraid to face it. This sin and guilt weighs on your heart and conscience still today. But Christ remains the Crucified One. He is risen, alive, never to die again, and as surely as he is alive his death remains your life. His condemnation on the cross remains the forgiveness of your sins. His resurrection is the continual trumpet, which you hear in his precious gospel, that God declares you, an unworthy and helpless sinner, to be righteous in his sight.

So today, on Easter, during the Feast of our Lord's Resurrection, on this Lord's Day and every Sunday, this remains our sermon and our confession. We know nothing but Christ and him crucified. His blood still marks our heart's door. Faith continues to point to this blood as death continues to pass over it.

When I lived in Iowa I used to meet up with a couple pastors every week to study. On my route to one of the churches I would pass by a house with a big cross in the front yard. The cross was empty, and instead of Christ's body it bore the following words, "He is." This is a well-meaning attempt to say that

Jesus is risen because he is no longer on the cross. People will sometimes criticize us Lutherans for having a crucifix, an image of the cross with Jesus' body on it. They say that Jesus is no longer on the cross, because he is risen. While this sentiment is certainly well-meaning, it is very much flawed. Of course Jesus is no longer on the cross. But this is not the sign of Jesus' resurrection. While it's perfectly fine to have an image of a cross to remind you of what Christ did, it is not the empty cross that proves Jesus is risen. An empty cross, by itself, only proves that someone was crucified, died, and then was taken off of the cross. Certainly, the two other men who were crucified with Jesus were not left on the cross either. No, the empty cross doesn't show that Jesus rose from the dead. Instead, the empty tomb shows this.

When the women came early on Sunday morning to the tomb of Jesus, they expected to see a body. The image of his body on the cross was no doubt burned into their minds. They saw their Savior hang on the cross in anguish. And now they were trying to find some comfort for themselves as they honored the dead body of their teacher. Perhaps they could replace the image of a crucified Christ with the image of a dead Christ who seems to rest peacefully in the tomb. It's a good thing to anoint the dead. It's a good thing to honor the body of those you love. But this is not where we find our comfort. We don't find our comfort by how we dress up the corpse or by all the nice things we say about the deceased. Instead, we find our comfort in how he died. Did your loved one die trusting in and confessing his Savior? That's what comforts a Christian. So how are we comforted on this Easter Morning? It isn't by looking for Jesus' body among the dead. It is being assured that his death took away our sins. And how do we have this assurance? How do we know that the man hanging on the cross was reconciling unworthy sinners back to God? We know this because he is risen. His body is not in the tomb. He is the Crucified and Risen Lord Jesus Christ who has made full satisfaction for our sins to God.

We preach Christ crucified. We preach a crucified Christ. When we eat his body and blood, we are confessing his death until he comes. Why can we confess and proclaim this death of Jesus? Why would we confess and proclaim his death? Because he is risen from the dead, and he is coming again to be our Judge. We say in the Creed, "I look to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come." Where do we look for this resurrection? Not in our own dying bodies. Not in our own earthly comforts, which are here today and gone tomorrow. No, we look to the resurrection in the Crucified One who burst from the grave, sat down at the right hand of the Father, and continues to give us life in his gospel and sacraments.

When we eat and drink the body and blood of our Lord Jesus here at this altar, we are proclaiming his death. This means that we proclaim all of what Jesus has done, including his resurrection. It's as the hymn goes:

Jesus, in Thy cross are centered
All the marvels of Thy grace;
Thou, my Savior, once hast entered
Through Thy blood the holy place:
Thy sacrifice holy there wrought my redemption,
From Satan's dominion I now have exemption;
The way is now free to the Father's high throne,
Where I may approach Him, in Thy name alone.

When you take the Lord's Supper at this altar, you are confessing all the marvels of his grace. Confessing his death is not just confessing that he died. It is confessing what his death has fulfilled and won for us. It is confessing that he, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is the one and only God, the Creator of all things, who made us in his own image as male and female. It is confessing that his Word recorded in the Bible is true and without errors, and that it is powerful to create faith and keep us in the faith. It is to confess that baptism saves us, that his body and blood are actually given to us in the bread and the wine for the forgiveness of our sins. It is to confess that he was raised from the dead and that he will come again one day to judge the living and the dead. Everything the Bible says is centered in Christ the Crucified, the Lamb of God who was sacrificed for us. So when we confess him, the Crucified One, we are confessing everything he is, everything he has done, and everything he says.

Paul calls the Lord's Supper the festival of purity and truth. A few years ago I heard some pastor say that Jesus didn't die for pure doctrine, but he died for people. He was trying to say that it is wrong for us to withhold the Lord's Supper from people if they do not hold to the same pure doctrine we hold to. He was accusing those who insist on pure doctrine of not caring about people. So again he said, "Jesus didn't die for pure doctrine; he died for people." But this is silly. Of course Jesus died for people. He died for the sins of all people. And he died for pure doctrine. That is to say, he died so that we, poor unworthy sinners, would receive from him his pure Word and teaching. Because it is in his doctrine, in his teaching, where we have the certainty that our sins are forgiven. His doctrine isn't cold and lifeless. No, this is the living Word of the living God who raised his Son from the dead. It's his doctrine. And everything he has he gives to us. He died so he could give us every assurance from his Word that we are his and he is ours. If we don't give the Lord's Supper to those who don't agree with or haven't learned what we teach from God's Word, this can seem harsh. It doesn't seem comforting. But what has our Lord taught us? He has taught us to turn to his Word. If you are visiting but can't take communion today, it is only so that you would learn the great treasures your Lord died on the cross to give you. You should know what you are confessing when you partake of this sacrament. Jesus wants you to know and be strengthened in this doctrine, because he loves you. You are most welcome at all times to learn what your Savior died and rose to teach you.

Jesus wants you to know his Word. He wants to strengthen your faith. He wants to keep you in his care and strengthen you by his Holy Spirit. He wants to continue to forgive you of your sins, be with you in your dying hour, hide you under the shadow of his wings, and raise your body to eternal life. This is why he died for you. And as surely as he did not stay dead but rose bodily from the grave, he remains the one who died for you. His Word remains your source of life, comfort, joy, and confidence at all times. Christ is crucified. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed! Amen.