

6th Week after the Epiphany
February 12/13, 2022

This world is filled with people who deny the resurrection of Christ, but then turn around and in the next moment have hope for a longer and more prosperous life. The reality often seen is not that they do not want life, they just want it on their own terms. Is this not at the heart of the sinful struggle we have? We want to be the masters of our own destiny. The problem with such thoughts is that we are reminded every day in so many different ways that such a thing is not possible. The moment we try to believe we have control, that moment is shattered by something that is out of our control.

If Christ has not been raised from the dead, then everything I have said, all that I believe is to be pitied. But, in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead and because He has been raised, there is hope. Not hope as the world lives it, delusional, more like wishful thinking, trying the same tired old thing wrapped up in newer garb, but an assurance that because Jesus lives, we live. I said, "We live," because it is not just a there and then idea, but the reality that you and I have our being through the One through whom and for whom all things were made.

The proposition of Christianity is really quite simple. If we live this life we have been given without any thought or action in the One who made us, we are animated for a few score years, seeking what we seek, and then reach the end. This life ceases. Such a life is lived without any real hope, just momentary distractions along the way. But if we see that there is true light which illumines all people, we learn how to walk in the hope that there is more. There is! It means that life has a different meaning than what the world promotes. It is a life filled with the actions our hearts long for.

Listen to the words of the One who saves us. He is not just comforting us amidst the craziness of this world – though He has and does – but He is inviting us to embark on a grand adventure. To be blessed is to enter into the work that produces a blessing. It is time for us to leave behind the wishful thinking of the world which permeates our society in order to live according to the word of the Lord. He has come to lift us out of the mire of worldly thinking in order to see things as they are and live according to His never-changing word.

In Luke, we hear of four blessings and four woes, contrasting the way of righteousness and the way of wickedness. They speak of the contrast between walking by faith and living sinfully as the world does. These are the two positions which daily tug at us. Will you live by faith for the Hope you have in Christ, or live as the world has lived since the Fall?

The blessings are easy to see, but hard to do. Blessed are you who are hungry. He's not talking about filling your belly, but about being hungry for what is right and fitting. You see this in the world. All of the crowds that gather, objecting to circumstances, are proclaiming their hunger. But not all crowds gather to seek the way of the Lord. Be led by the righteousness of the Lord and seek after the eternal ways of the Lord. Be guided by the Holy Spirit to hold fast to that which satisfies – the way of the Lord – and you shall be filled to overflowing. Mourn at the state of this age. Do not join in the anger and vitriol, for the faithful are seeking after the same thing: the righteousness of the Living Lord. Be diligent, prudent, and discerning, for there are many trails that can take any one of us off track. We weep at the state of the world, but when the perfect comes we shall see clearly how the Lord has wound all things together for good for we who love Him. In following the Lord, you will be hated. Do not return hate for hate, but return love for hate. God is love. The world hates anything that reminds them that they are not in control. Our Lord is Sovereign of all.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say again, rejoice, for the One through whom all things have their being has come to You and called you to walk with Him all the days of your life. It is not easy in this world, but He will lead you all the days of your life. He will guide you along the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

Jesus gives us warning. Woe to those who are satisfied, for this world is fraught with difficulty and we are to remain ever vigilant lest what has been given us be taken away. Be shrewd as serpents, yet remain as innocent as doves. To remain content with the temporary things of this world is to seek the continued striving for sin and not the kingdom of God.

Woe to those who are content with just a little sin. Jesus has told us that just a little leaven leavens the whole lump. Sin is a cancer that our Savior must remove. If we leave it be, it will consume us. This is what the disease of sin does. We must stay on the hard journey of seeking righteousness of the Lord, day by day, for He will remove that which separates us from Him. Without the Lord, there is spiritual poverty. No amount of worldly things can satiate the spiritual hunger we all have which is meant to be satisfied only by the Lord.

Woe to those who laugh at the sinfulness of this world. It is right that we see that many of the things this world calls entertainment are really offensive. The onslaught of the moral sensibilities our Lord has place in us are offensive. What we call entertainment is seeking to entice us, lull us, place in us false hope. It is not that we must shun them – and some should – but that we see that the many ways that lead us away from being wholly satisfied in the Lord are offered all day long.

We all long to be accepted by those around us. At what cost? Will we compromise the way of the Lord in order to be acceptable? Is momentary fame worth the cost of your dignity and value in the Lord's eyes? This world promotes selling our soul for momentary acceptance. But look at how the world treats those who are no longer acceptable. The Lord has called you by name. Do not settle for a worldly reputation, but live in who you are in His eyes.

It is a daily challenge to abide in the faith which we have been given. There are many things that come along which will tempt us to compromise the call we have received from the Lord. Thanks be to God, for we have an advocate in Christ who helps us each step of the way. It is not that we must do these things in order to receive salvation, for salvation is ours through the One who has saved us. It is that as we journey through this life we come to trust the Lord more and more and the truth that daily He is saving us from the things which would take us down. We are reminded that we need to lean upon the Lord in and through all things. He is mighty to save and will lead us through all of the difficulties that will come.

Our Savior, Jesus, is the first fruit of the resurrection. When we are united with Him, we join with Him on the upward journey of faith. Our hope is in what He has accomplished, is accomplishing and will accomplish. If Christ is first, that means there are those who will follow. We who believe are the ones for whom this promise is spoken. This is why Jesus reminds us that we must abide in Him and He in us, for apart from Him we can do nothing.

Jeremiah gave us a prophetic warning. The heart is wicked and deceitful. We tell ourselves that we are better than most, but this is deception. Only God understands what sin has done to our hearts which is why we are to call out in faith, "Create in me a new and clean heart." We are to look to the One who knows us and trust that He will deal with all that needs to be dealt with at the right time. In simple words, do not lean on your own understanding, but wholly upon our Savior who will accomplish all that is needed so that we who love Him may be with Him eternally. Happy are they who follow our Savior, Jesus! Amen.