

Easter Sunday
April 16/17, 2022

What shall we say to these things? If Christ has not been raised from the dead, then we, above all others are to be most pitied. For if Christ has not been raised, then our faith is in vain. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead by the glory of the Father. Having been united with Him in a death like His, we are united with Him in a resurrection like His. In a world filled with skepticism and failed attempts at seeking that which fully and wholly satisfies, through faith, we have the greatest portion, having discovered by the power of the Holy Spirit, that for which we were created. Created in the image of the firstborn, united in faith in Him, we should and rightly do celebrate this day.

We are also to recognize that God shows no partiality. If you have been very faithful, being a part of an active fellowship the whole of your life and observant in the ways of the Lord, there is no greater gift than the gift which is given because Jesus lives. The difference is in the maturity in faith you may obtain by being faithful, but it is no less than will be accomplished for all who run the race of faith so as to obtain the prize which is ours in Christ Jesus. All who believe are workers in the vineyard whether joining at the beginning of the day or in the last hour.

We know that we live in a world that is increasingly hostile to the truth of the resurrection of Jesus our Savior. Sometimes it seems as though others would rather believe in anything other than the truth of Jesus, raised from the dead. One very simple way of understanding this, which makes sense, is the truth of the rebellion against the things of the Lord in this world. If Christ has been raised from the dead then all that He said is true. If what He said is true, then what we all need is what only He can give. But, this requires coming to Him and seeing our lives molded to His in the faith we have been given. That is really the rub point. It is as if some say, "It's fine that Jesus provided a way for us to live forever, but I really do not want all of that religious stuff." Of course, the same person will go out and practice, in ritual, the same thing each day, being quite religious. You see, so many think that religion is a bunch of hoopla we do on Sunday mornings. Singing, saying prayers, crossing ourselves, and things like that. But how is that any different than the routines we all have in our daily lives? We each have ways of doing things which we do repetitively and with great intention. But religion is not what Easter is all about. We are called to come to God and God in the flesh has come to show us the way. But it seems that there are many who say they want to find God, but that they want to do so on their own terms. The only way to find God is to be found by Him, and He has shown up to reveal who He is. There is no other way. If you want the truth, then receive the truth and all who do find what they have been seeking.

Easter is about the truth of the Living God who became flesh, dwelt among us, did what was need to pave the way so that all who unite with Him in an eternal relationship are conformed to His image. A reflection of His image is in all who have or ever will live, but because of Easter, we know that it is the indwelling of His presence, purpose, and power is what guides our lives to learn more each day what it means to love the Lord and our neighbor.

In the beginning God said, "Let us make humanity in our image." I suspect we sometimes think that this means that it was finished then and there. But God knew what Adam and Eve would do. It should be apparent to us now that what happened in the Garden was the beginning. We are now in the place of that next step. That next step is the way of Christ. We were created to be conformed to the image of Christ. We were made to dwell forever in a never-ending love relationship with the One who created us. Through Him, it is not only possible but is

the very thing that He is doing – being made into children of the Heavenly Father. This is what faith invites us to. It is not a proposition to be cleaned up, learn how to behave a little better, and get along with others. To be sure, that comes with it, but it is about being made complete. I sometimes think that rather than saying the word ‘perfect’ we would better understand these things if the word ‘complete’ was used. In Christ we are being made complete. What was begun in our physical birth is completed in the rebirth that comes in faith. Through faith, Christ will complete us. We are reborn through Christ to dwell with Trinity forever.

How is it that we can have such confidence in these things? It is because Jesus lives. If He had gone to the cross, paid a price we cannot pay, but was not raised from the dead, what would have been accomplished? Just that is a nice sentiment, but not much use. No, in being raised from the dead, He showed the way that is before us. We too shall be resurrected in a resurrection like His. This is the hope of faith. Though I die, yet shall I live. Not only I, but all who have followed Christ in the way of the cross.

Some might say that all of this was not fair because for God it must have been easy. I suspect the case for this is greatly understated. It is only because He is God that Jesus was able to do what needed to be done and He did it perfectly. This is a great mystery, but it is the foundation of the Christian faith. What we do here this day in celebrating Easter is a good thing, but it is not the thing itself. Living in the hope and promise that the resurrection gives us points us to Jesus who is our hope. He has said those marvelous words of hope to each one of us, “Come, follow me.”

You have been invited. Through your baptism you were invited. Today, you have been invited. Each day you are invited. Come, just as you are, and receive what the Lord gives. You may continue to look for that which can only be satisfied by a relationship with the Living God in all the places where people seek to be satisfied apart from the Lord. It is futile, for only in the Creator of life is life found. It is not for us to discover, but for us to receive what He has already done so that we may be found and come into the purpose for which we have been created.

Scripture tells us that Christ is the First Fruits. In the metaphor of Jesus where He tells us in many places that we are to bear fruit befitting the kingdom of God, He is the First. If there is a first, there will be a second. We are called to follow where Jesus leads the way. Yes, He died, as we all shall, but death could not keep Him. So also, we who are united with Christ are united with His resurrection. You are invited. The way is set before you. The stone has been rolled away. The only obstacle is your unwillingness. Christ holds out His hand to us all so that we may take it and be led on the grand and eternal journey of faith.

Through all of the doubts and confusion of this age, hear the timeless truth of the proclamation that rang out on that incredible day. Our Savior was not just a good man, teaching us good things, but was the One who has come to lead the way into everlasting life. Do not look for Him amongst the dead, the past, or the wishful ideas that pop up from time to time. We are called into the presence of our Living God who is bringing all who believe together in eternity. We will sojourn in this age for a bit more, but our hope is renewed in the simple truth that Christ has been raised from the dead. He lives and gives us His life. He lives and we are His and He is ours. Oh, what glorious truth shines out of an empty tomb. Oh, what hope we have in a world filled with despair. Oh, what glory awaits our good and gracious Lord who leads us home.

See the empty tomb and believe.

HE IS RISEN!

He is risen indeed. Amen.