

The Resurrection of Our Lord (Easter Day): April 4, 2021

“Sincerity and Truth”

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

On this blessed Easter Day, we recall the Holy Spirit’s words through St. Paul, *“Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”*¹

There is much about which to boast today. This is Easter. This is the Day we recall and celebrate Jesus’ victory over the grave as He rose triumphantly from death. This is a day that most necessarily involves boasting and joy, but in whom? In what?

The text says we are to keep this festival in sincerity and truth. The word sincerity is an important word in the Bible. It is only used three times; once here and twice in 2 Corinthians. It is derived from words that mean to be tested by the light of the sun; that is, to be completely pure. This is why Paul also uses the illustration of the old, evil leaven. Even the good news of victory over death and the grave can be tainted with evil and malice; and this can be done very quickly.

Why are we here on this day? I know that it’s Easter and Sunday, but what is it about this day that brings more people to church? Not just more people, but those who come every week approach this day with a different attitude. So, again I raise the question, why are we here? Is it because it seems to be more upbeat and joyful than the other services? Is it because long absences from the House of God make the heart grow fonder and this day feels like a more pleasant day to arrive, because perhaps there will not be as much Law preached and I don’t have to feel quite as bad for my sins?

Is it tradition that brings us here? This is where traditions can be a good thing. Do we come simply out of love for another who brought us here, only to then realize

¹ 1 Corinthians 5:6–8

that there is One already here who loves us more than the one who begged or forced us to come?

Truth be told, Easter Sundays are difficult to preach, because Pastors are tempted to try and reach those that come only for these days. Pastors understand their role as a spiritual father as confessed in the Large Catechism; so, when a child comes home it is a great time for much rejoicing. There is much to say, much time to make-up, and Pastors want to just let it pour out.

Sadly, what happens? This causes many to tune out, because they feel attacked. They feel singled out, and that is a problem. Why? Because this day is not about you. This sermon is not about you. It is for everyone! This day of victory over the grave is for you, for all of you.

There is a great importance for hearing Paul's words on Easter Day. There are many reasons for which we come to this day, or approach this day differently from other Sundays, and Paul warns us about the danger of doing so. We are to keep this festival in sincerity and truth, ***"Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life."***² The genuineness of our faith is tested by the light of the sun. This day is for all Christians, for all people, to know and hear the truth about Jesus Christ, ***"In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."***³

This is why we are here. We are here for the feeding and strengthening of our faith. If we are here only for tradition, or love for another person, not only are we not being sincere, but the truth is not in us. The light shines bright on this day, and the works of love are exposed. If we base our religion on love, especially the love of others, we will soon discover that others don't love us as much as we love them (or at least as much as we think we love them). This leaven drives a self-serving attitude that only leads to death and despair, and causes us to not only look down upon others, but we stop our ears and close our hearts to the living Word of God. Instead of living in the joy of the resurrection, we would rather go looking back

² Galatians 6:7-8

³ John 1:4-5

into the tomb, searching for what we lost. We search for the old way of life, the actions we want to define for ourselves as loving.

It is true that we are supposed to love one another, as much as we love ourselves, but that is not the reason for being here today. That is not what brings us Christians together. It is Christ and Him alone which draws us together. His Word binds us together. His Spirit is given to us through the waters of baptism.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, today we celebrate Easter, but every Sunday is Easter. Every week we gather to celebrate the festival. For those that are here, who haven't been here in a while, I am truly happy to see you here. For those who come every week, I am happy to see you too, but you have a hard task today. Have you made this day about you? Have you compared your church attendance with another and judged yourself to be a better Christian? That is a spirit of malice that seeks death.

As joyous as this day is, it drives a wedge between God's people. On the day of victory over death, don't run back to the ways of death. You will not find Christ in the empty tomb with your sins. You will find Him here. He is risen and gives you His life, His forgiveness, His peace that passes all understanding.

Sincerity and truth include two things: repentance and the Gospel. Repentance is the gift of the Holy Spirit that should drive you to your knees in sorrow over the many ways you have failed. It drives you to see your ways of death in open and honest hearts, so that you can bury them and leave them in the tomb. It drives you to confess, "I am a poor, miserable sinner. I have sinned against God in thought, word, and deed. I have nothing to bring before God, but my sins and ways of death. I try to seek my own ways out, and that really just makes me miserable. I need Jesus. I need forgiveness. I need grace. I need life."

I realize there has been a lot of Law on this day that we perceive is to be only joyous and happy, but that is not why you called me here. The Law is to drive you under the pews. It is to shine the holy light of God's Law upon your life as a test, so that you are driven to see the seriousness of your sin. The only reason for anyone to come to church is in hunger and thirst for righteousness, which can only be found in Christ.

I know we all like to be built up and hear just how great we are and how much we can do for God, but this day puts a kibosh on all of that, does it not? Whether you come once a year, twice a year, 52 times a year, or 80 times a year, those times are not times where you are working for God. He is one who works for you. Jesus is the One whose works met the perfect demands of God's holy law. Every demand of living in faith towards God and in love for the neighbor was done by Jesus. The truly innocent and holy One was condemned as guilty and died the death for sinners, for the wicked, for the evil, selfish ones, for you and for me.

Three days later He rose from the dead. His life was tested by the light, judged by God, and His death was for you. For all who believe, God sees Christ's works in you. Jesus is truly sincere, and thus so are all those who are in Him. They cannot help but living in the light. Being born into the family of God, having the light of Christ given to them, you cannot help but be where the light is.

When the cold, unforgiving world storms and rages against your sinful flesh about death, and sickness, and hardship, and loneliness, and turmoil, and selfishness, and independence, and autonomy (which means being a law unto yourself), here is the warmth of Jesus' love for fallen sinners. Like a hearth, the fire of God's Law and the warmth of His comforting Gospel is preached from lectern and pulpit. The warmth of a Father's loving embrace is remembered as you walk by the baptismal font. The family table is set with the warmth of God's grace placed in your hand and poured in your mouth as you receive the crucified body and shed blood of Jesus for you. While you are held in baptism, sung to in hymns, spoken to by God's Word, and fed on Jesus, you are constantly reminded that victory over death is yours! Christ has done it for you, for all of you!

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we will react to this day much like the women in our Gospel lesson. Some will approach in fear, others will flee with trembling and astonishment, saying nothing to anyone because they are afraid of what another might think or say. Wherever you may be on that spectrum, Jesus has died and risen for you.

“Then let us feast this Easter Day
On Christ, the bread of heaven;
The Word of grace has purged away

The old and evil leaven.
Christ alone our souls will feed;
He is our meat and drink indeed;
Faith lives upon no other!”⁴

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

⁴ Christ Jesus Lay in Death’s Strong Bands LSB 458: 7

Prayer of the Church
The Resurrection of Our Lord
4 April 2021

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs. Lord God, on this glorious day, fill Your people with a holy fear at the resurrection of Your Son, that we would tremble no longer before the grave but rejoice and live in the sincerity and truth of Your power to save. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Be with Matthew, our Synod president; Brian, our district president; and all our pastors. Keep them faithful to deliver to Your people the apostolic Gospel of Your Son's death, burial and resurrection. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Let us hold fast to the Word preached to us, that receiving it with joy we may take our stand in it and be saved by it. Hinder all who would sow doubt into our hearts, and grant us courage to confess its truth in our life and conversation. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Bless Joseph, our president, Kim, our governor, and all who make and administer our laws. Frustrate the forces of evil, and do not let our leaders cooperate with them or further their goals. Guard our armed forces as they stand watch for us at home and abroad. Let them serve with honor and integrity. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Father, we give thanks that in Holy Baptism we receive forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation, bless those who celebrate baptismal anniversaries this week, especially, *Zared, Tyler, Ben, Chezlie, Ken, Gabe, and Gavin*, grant that by Your Word and Spirit they may faithfully keep the covenant into which they have been called, boldly confess their Savior, and finally share with all Your saints the joys of eternal life; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Have mercy on the sick and those in need, the homebound, the shut-in, the sick, the anxious, the lonely or oppressed in any way [*especially Carmen, Susan, Zoey, Floyd Doughty, Jen Zebuhr, Gordon Robbins, Keith Teggatz, Mary Ann Teggatz, and those we name in our hearts*]. Let the dawning light of the new creation in Christ sustain them in faith. In accord with Your will, grant them renewed health — a foretaste of their eternal healing in Him. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Give us joy in Your Son's great victory feast as He shares it with us from this altar. In the eating of His true body and the drinking of His precious blood in faith, overcome our sin by His forgiveness and swallow up our death in His life, that we may be glad and rejoice in His salvation. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Comfort those who mourn with the truth of Christ's empty tomb, that in the midst of their grief they may abide in the hope of His resurrection. Uphold them in faith as they await the day when You will wipe every tear from all faces. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We join today in singing eternal alleluias with innumerable angels in festal gathering, with the assembly of the firstborn enrolled in heaven and with the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and we bring these petitions before You, dear Father, trusting in Your mercy; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**