

Mount Olive Lutheran Church
5327 W. Washington Blvd.
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53208-1798

The Resurrection of our Lord
April 12, 2009 (Easter Sunrise)
Exodus 15:1-11

"Shouts of Joy and Victory"
by Pastor Mark E. Wangerin

Introduction

Our text for this morning is very fitting, but perhaps some of you are wondering at the Easter connection. In some respects it might be a reading that would have been fitting in many Jewish homes in the last week as they participated in the Jewish Passover celebration which began Wednesday/Thursday. Yet we are gathered here on this Easter Sunday, the Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. And what does this reading that has as its context a very specific event in the history of the Old Testament people of God have to do with this day? There must be some connection because going back way into the early years of the Christian Church this reading was closely associated with Easter Sunday. Let us consider it therefore under the theme, "Shouts of Joy and Victory".

I. The Victory at the Sea

"I will sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted. The horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea." So sang Moses and all the people of Israel of the victory at the Red Sea. Think of what had transpired. The people of Israel had left Egypt in haste in the darkness following the tenth plague which had devastated every household of Egypt with the deaths of the first-born even as the angel of death had passed over the homes of the Israelites painted with the blood of the lamb on their doorposts. The pharaoh had let the people go. But then he had changed his mind. He called forth his best troops and mounted his own chariot, and pursued them. And the children of Israel found themselves trapped with the Red Sea before them and the army of Pharaoh behind. They cried out in their distress and their horror. They had no place to turn. But the Lord spoke and said, "Tell the people to go forward". And the Lord divided the sea before them. The waters separated and the children of Israel went forth through the sea on dry ground. What a spectacular event this was. Can we even imagine it? Can the images that many of us remember from the movie the "Ten Commandments" do justice to this miracle? And then the Egyptians followed, but the Lord hindered them in their progress. The angel of the Lord stood between them and the people of Israel. They became bogged down in the midst of the sea--and the waters returned. Pharaoh and all his hosts were swept away by the waters of the sea. And what more could the people do than sing of the victory. "The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him. ... "Your right hand, O Lord, was majestic in power. Your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy." The Lord led his people through the sea. He saved them from their enemies. He would lead them through the wilderness to the promised land. They would never forget the victory at the sea.

II. The Victory at the Grave

And if that event involved a great multitude of people, the event that we are here to celebrate today took place in a much quieter way. There was no pillar of cloud or fire. The angel of the Lord did not stand in the midst of the cloud. But there was an angel who rolled a stone away. The only witnesses were some soldiers who were overcome by the sight of the glory of the Son of God risen from the dead. But it was in the quiet of the early morning on that day, that the greatest news of the world would be heard. It came not with the blast of wind separating the waves of the sea, nor with the cries of despair of an army being drowned in the midst of the sea, it came in the quiet voices of angels, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" It took place not with multitudes present, but for some faithful women and eleven frightened disciples. It came with the simple address of the Lord to a distraught Mary Magdalene, "Mary." It came in the reasoned discourse of the stranger along the road to Emmaus. It took place behind locked doors with the Easter greeting, "Peace be with you!:" But what took place changed the world forever. And what a victory it was. The victory at the sea was powerful and great. But this victory was even greater. For the foe routed on that Easter was a greater enemy than the mighty Pharaoh of Egypt and his army, for the foe defeated was the devil and death itself. As Scripture says, "Christ being raised from the dead will die no more, death has no more dominion over Him." We sang before in the opening hymn:

The foe in triumph shouted
When Christ lay in the tomb;
But lo, he now is routed,
His boast is turned to gloom.

And oh, how the shouts of joy and victory are echoed again. "I will sing to the Lord for he is highly exalted ... The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him." We sang before in words we have not sung in quite some time: "This is the feast of victory for our God! Alleluia!" Yes, it is truly the feast of victory. The Lord has won the battle. The Lord's right arm is highly exalted. Christ our Lord is risen again in victory. He has conquered the grave.

III. Our Song of Victory

And interestingly then, the song of victory of Moses, the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ becomes our victory as well. It was not without some great understanding of the meaning of the Resurrection that in the early church the Sacrament of Holy Baptism was administered for the newly instructed members of the church early in the morning (just after midnight) of Easter Day. They passed through the waters of baptism from death to life. They lived the words of St. Paul, "You were buried with Christ by baptism into his death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so you might walk in newness of life." The new life was theirs in the promise of God in Baptism, in the Lord's Supper, in their

faith in the risen Lord. And we too have been granted that same victory by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Most assuredly, we too who have gone through the waters of Holy Baptism have passed through death to life in our Savior Jesus Christ. What a glorious promise we have. And in that promise we know we shall live forever and that death no longer has any power over us even as Scripture reminds us. What a victory. We too can sing: "I will sing to the Lord for he is highly exalted, the horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea." The shouts of joy and victory are ours as well.

Conclusion

And most assuredly we have God's own promise that we too we will sing the song of the victory at the sea. For in the vision of St. John in the Book of Revelation we read: "And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb: "Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed." (Rev. 15:2-4) The song of Moses and the song of the Lamb? Yes, for the victory at the sea and the victory over the grave were both part of the saving work of God for his redeemed people. The one miracle prepared the way for the greatest miracle of all in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Come, you faithful raise the strain
Of triumphant gladness!
God has brought his Israel
Into joy from sadness,
Loosed from Pharaoh's bitter yoke
Jacob's sons and daughters,
Led them with unmoistened foot
Through the Red Sea waters.

This the spring of souls today:
Christ has burst his prison
And from three days' sleep in death
As a sun has risen;
All the winter of our sins,
Long and dark, is flying
From his light, to whom is giv'n
Laud and praise undying.

Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia! Amen.