

Mount Olive Lutheran Church
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The Resurrection of our Lord (Easter Sunday)
March 27, 2005
Colossians 3:1-4

“Raised with Christ”

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Introduction

The Epistle lesson which serves as our text appears to take a lot for granted. St. Paul begins with a very strong and bold assertion, “since you have been raised with Christ...” In an age such as ours, or even very much in the time when the apostle wrote these words to the Colossians, there would be many who would say, “Prove it! What do you mean by this?” There would be others who would be even stronger in their reaction, “What utter nonsense!” But these words go right to the very heart of our Easter celebration this day and they involve us personally in the results. In fact, we can with complete assurance announce in the words of the theme that we are “Raised with Christ.” May the Lord grant us his grace and His Holy Spirit that we live in this promise.

I. That First Easter

St. Paul wrote the words of our text about thirty years or so after the events of Holy Week. He wrote with complete assurance: “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.” Consider for a moment how those words would have sounded to the twelve, to the women who had followed Jesus, to all of his disciples on that first day of the week, very early in the morning. It was most certainly not on the minds of those women who ventured to the tomb early on Easter morning. They were concerned about who would roll away the stone so they could attend to the final burial rites of Jesus. But the sight that greeted them at the tomb was even more astonishing. The stone was rolled away. The angel at the tomb had astounding news: “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.” The women were afraid but full of joy. And soon, Jesus Himself appeared to them with greetings of peace. Their sorrow was turned to joy. And for St. Paul who writes in our text, he too had an unforgettable encounter with the risen Lord on the road to Damascus. He knew what it means that Christ is seated in glory at the right hand of God. He could write with all assurance in another place, “Now is Christ risen from the dead.” In that certainty he makes the Resurrection most personal, “Since then you have been raised with Christ ...”

II. New Life

And that brings the resurrection home to each of us. We have been raised in Christ’s

resurrection. There is a new life for us in Him. The Scripture speaks on numerous occasions about the life which is ours in Christ. In our text Paul repeats the phrase twice, "on the things above." There is where our heart and our minds should be set "on the things above" not on earthly things. What a lesson is here for our materialistic and thing-filled world. Our hope is not in earthly things. How many put their confidence there. How many look to the things of this world for their joy and satisfaction. But that is not the place to look. The world is broken by sin. Human lives are broken by sin. Christ the risen Lord is the only one who makes us whole and alive. He would set our sights on the things above.

Yet as our text continues, that occurs when we have died. Have died? Yes, for Paul writes, "For you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God." When have we died. Well most certainly our sins have died with Christ upon the cross. And in our baptism we have been buried with him. In fact, in the previous chapter of Colossians, Paul makes just that point: "Having been buried with Him in baptism and raised with Him through your faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead." There is the connection between Easter and our baptism. In the early church, the adult confirmands were baptized and received into church membership as part of the celebration of Easter. For they recognized most clearly the connection between baptism and Christ's resurrection. It is in our baptismal regeneration and new life that we have been raised with Christ.

III. Glory to Come

The last point made in this Easter epistle is this. Our glory in the life to come is firmly founded in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. St. Paul writes, "When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." It is as the catechism has taught regarding the resurrection of Jesus. His resurrection is the proof of our resurrection as well. God the Father accepted the sacrifice of His Son and Jesus is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. Christ will come again in glory. When that occurs, the saints of God will appear with him in glory as well. St. John in his first epistle puts it like this: "We shall be like him for we shall see him as he is." That glory will never fade away. It will be an incorruptible, eternal glory in him. That is the ultimate promise of the words, "Raised with Christ."

Conclusion

So we have seen again the eternal importance of the resurrection. The celebration today is not just a nice way to herald the return of spring. It is not an age old custom of observing new life. It is the everlasting seal of God for each of us who are redeemed by the blood of Christ. We are baptized into his death. We are raised with Christ to new life. Thanks be to God.

As Martin Luther wrote in his great Easter hymn:

Christ Jesus lay in death's strong bands
For our offenses given
But now at God's right hand he stands
And brings us life from heaven.
Therefore let us joyful be
And sing to God right thankfully
Loud songs of alleluias
Alleluia!

It was a strange and dreadful strife
When life with death contended.
The victory remained with life
The reign of death is ended
Holy Scripture plainly saith
That death is swallowed up by death
His sting is lost forever.
Alleluia!

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

