

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

The glow of Easter has not diminished. Christ is risen! Alleluia! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! We are still reveling in resurrection. We can hardly hold back our excitement! “With high delight [we] unite In songs of great jubilation” (LSB483). We have cast off our fear, for “Christ has triumphed! He is living!” (LSB465) Easter dries our tears, for “*behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered.*” “Christ, who once was slain” did “burst His three day prison” (LSB482). The “*Lamb, who was slain,*” He who “*by [His] blood ... ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and ... made them a kingdom and priests to our God ...,*” He lives. “*Worthy is the Lamb who was slain.*” He lives and reigns.

So what now? Christ rose from the dead. What now? Surely, we know what it meant if Jesus hadn’t risen from the dead, if His flesh had rotted away, if His bones still lay in the tomb. Then, Paul says, we’re pitiable people. Then fear for we are still in our sins, fear for when death takes hold of us, it is forever, fear for our adversary, the devil won and is smacking his lips knowing that there is nothing keeping him from devouring you (1 Pet. 5:8)!

But Christ has risen from the dead; the last two weeks established that — the empty tomb, the angels’ announcement, Jesus’ evening visitation, the marks of His crucifixion. Truly, the power of sin and death and Satan has been destroyed. So what now?

This question must surely have been on the minds of the disciples, too. What now? Things were not working out the way they expected. They were still a bit confused about the kingdom, confused enough to ask Jesus after the resurrection, “*Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?*” (Acts 1:6)

What now? There was nothing they could do that Jesus had not already finished, so they did as Jesus Himself had commanded them: “*after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee*” (Matt. 26:32); they did as Jesus told them through the women on the resurrection morn: “*go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me*” (Matt. 28:10). They went to where Jesus promised to be.

Their example is good for us, too, who ask “what now?” There is nothing for us to add to Jesus’ completed work, either; therefore, let us also go where Jesus has promised to be for us. Let us be faithful in meeting Jesus in the Divine Service. He’s here according to promise: “*where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them*” (Matt. 18:20). And that’s why we come on the Lord’s Days — to meet Jesus and to hear from Him.

To be sure, we hear from others. Today, we heard Luke tell us of Saul's encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. And this encounter did not leave Saul unchanged. He was confronted with his persecution of Christ's people, a persecution that, Jesus said, was really of Him. And we know Saul repented, though we don't hear words to that effect, for he was baptized, calling on the Lord's name; and he was called into Christ's service, bearing witness to Jesus (Acts 22:15-16).

Today, we heard also John tell us of his vision of the heavenly host, the four living creatures, the twenty-four elders and angels "*numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands*" gathering around the throne and the Lamb. But we know not just they are there, but also that "*ransomed people*" are there, that "*great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages*" (Rev. 7:9) is there where Jesus is, joining their voices to the angels and archangels, praising God for His grace.

John also tells us how Peter was among the disciples that went to meet Jesus in Galilee. In Peter's encounter with Jesus, he, too, was changed. Peter was confronted, like Saul, with his sins — with his denial of Jesus in the courtyard of the High Priest. You've heard recently again what happened — three times Peter was asked, and three times Peter denied being associated with Jesus; and a rooster crowed. A look from Jesus was all it took for Peter to be overwhelmed with grief; "*he went out and wept bitterly*" (Luke 22:62), evidence of his own contrition and repentance.

Similarly, when we encounter Jesus at the Divine Service, we are confronted with our sins. We acknowledge our baptisms with the Trinitarian invocation, and then we confess: "I'm a poor, miserable sinner." "I confess my sins and iniquities, the new sins I've committed and the old sins that Satan continues to dredge up from my past and accuse me with." We speak our contrition and repentance.

But we confess "for the sake of obtaining the Absolution" (A Brief Exhortation to Confession, 21), for it is not the confession, *per se*, but the "Absolution, which is the true voice of the Gospel" (Apology, XIIa, 39). Forgiveness is what Christ earned by His cross, and forgiveness is what He gives His Church to proclaim and bestow. This is what we heard last Sunday in Jesus' words to the disciples: "*Peace be with you,*" and "*I'm sending you,*" and "*If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them*" (John 20:21, 23).

And so, generally, before the congregation, you hear your pastor say, "Upon this your confession," that is to say, for those of you who truly are "heartily sorry" for your sins and "sincerely repent of them," these words are for you: "In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins." The

authority, of course, is not mine personally, but it is “by virtue of my office” as afforded me by the congregation’s call; and the forgiveness I bestow is not my personal forgiveness, but Christ’s Himself. In our weekly encounter with Jesus, we poor sinners are also changed by the forgiveness of sins.

And what is done generally on Sundays for the congregation is offered individually to every sheep of God’s flock, not under compulsion, but “for the comfort and strengthening of our consciences” (A Brief Exhortation, 4). We are encouraged to make use of private confession and absolution — I’m here most Saturdays for that — not because we must but because it is another way we are served with God’s grace. As Luther taught, “When I urge you to go to Confession, I am doing nothing else than urging you to be a Christian” (A Brief Exhortation, 32).

It’s why Jesus took Peter aside and offered him a threefold absolution and restoration — for himself, to be sure, changing him from cowering to courageous Peter, but especially for the sake of the lambs and sheep Peter would be called upon to shepherd, that he might absolve and restore them, feed and tend them. And so, Peter and the pastors that follow after him are called to care for God’s flock, leading them to the still waters of Holy Baptism that restore us, feeding them at the bountiful table of forgiveness, life, and salvation that the Lord has prepared for us, guiding them by the staff of the Lord’s word that comforts us.

It’s still Eastertide. Jesus died and rose again for us, and Jesus invites us to come to where He is. What now? Well, He didn’t just do it for us, but for the world (1 John 2:2). And so, He also sends us forth, not for ourselves, but for the other sheep not of the fold (John 10:16). He sent forth Paul; suffering for the sake of the Gospel lay ahead of him. He sent forth Peter; he would die for the sake of the Gospel. What now? He sends us forth, too, “to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown.” Thus, we pray: “Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go but only that Your hand is leading us and Your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord” (LSB Collect for guidance in our calling).

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Christ is risen! Alleluia!