

Christ is risen. Alleluia.

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

Christians are Easter people; we are resurrection people. We rejoice in the risen Christ, and we “*proclaim the excellencies of Him who called [us] out of darkness into His marvelous light,*” who “*built [us] up [into] a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood,*” who made us “*a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession.*”

Jesus gives us words to celebrate in our Gospel text; He gives us something to look forward to. “*In my Father’s house are many rooms. ... I go to prepare a place for you ... I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.*” Jesus is talking our resurrection here, and life eternal with God the Father along with the Son and the Holy Spirit. That promise, that hope, is why this text is used so often at funerals; indeed, it’s the suggested Gospel text used at funerals. We still proclaim it; we still sing of it, as we will at the distribution: “I know that my Redeemer lives! What comfort this sweet sentence gives! He lives, he lives, who once was dead; He lives, my ever living head! He lives and grants me daily breath; He lives, and I shall conquer death; He lives my mansion to prepare; He lives to bring me safely there” (LSB461:1, 7).

And yet, our Gospel begins with ominous words. They’re foreboding: “*Let not your hearts be troubled.*” We hear it in that beloved Easter hymn, too: fears and tears and troubled hearts (LSB461:5).

The disciples were troubled. Jesus Himself was, too. Jesus knew who was going to betray Him, and after giving some hints about it, John says: “*Jesus was troubled in his spirit.*” And then Jesus told the disciples explicitly: “*Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me*” (John 13:21). Jesus also told Peter: “*Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times*” (John 13:38).

But Jesus was troubled by more than just these betrayals. He was troubled by the inexorable road that He was on. The demands of our salvation were enormous, and Jesus would later sweat drops of blood as He carried the weight of our sins (Luke 22:44). And He alone could carry them on the lonely road to the cross. “*Where I am going you cannot come,*” He told His disciples (John 13:33), not on this path, not for this purpose. There was but one sacrifice that would suffice, one stone precious enough, one stone chosen for the redemption of the world, one stone whose rejection by men meant that it would become the cornerstone of God’s spiritual house, the church.

What comfort could Jesus offer to hearts troubled by such news? He told the disciples first, “Don’t be troubled.” Things aren’t spiraling out of control. This is all according to the Father’s plan which He put together even before the world was made.

Second, He told the disciples: “Don’t just believe in God in the abstract; believe in God in the flesh. Believe in Me.” Jesus is the Son chosen to put the Father’s plan into effect. He is the one who would accomplish it, saying ultimately from the cross, “*It is finished*” as He “*bowed his head and gave up his spirit*” (John 19:30). Jesus “*is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world*” (1 John 2:2).

Third, Jesus pointed the disciples to His ultimate victory — a victory that would also be theirs by faith. Jesus’ victory was life after a three-day rest in the grave, which the angel would proclaim to the women at the tomb to calm their troubled hearts: “*Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said*” (Matt. 28:5-6). Jesus’ victory is resurrected life and a triumphant return to the Father’s side.

But Jesus didn’t depart without a promise. “*I go to prepare a place for you!*” More than that, “*I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.*” The promise for believers is a place in the Father’s house. Jesus affirms that His victory over death and the grave is our victory over the same. What was promised in the Old Testament was fulfilled in Jesus: “*‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (1 Cor. 15:54-57).

Dear saints, not just the disciples feared. Not just they wept. Not just they had troubled hearts. We do. We surely don’t fear over the same things, but we fear; we weep; we are troubled. They could be health problems for yourself or a loved one, employment insecurity, inflation worries, family strife, death, a world gone mad, worries of persecution, worries of “being canceled” for holding to the truth, maybe worries even that in the face of persecution you will betray Jesus or deny Him. Will my faith be strong enough?

A little more than two weeks ago, dear friends of our family received troubling news. A sister in Christ in our former church in Batesville, Arkansas — her name is Desha, a sister only a couple years older than Marge and I are — was told that she had liver cancer. That was compounded with a heart attack while at the hospital. They couldn’t do anything; she was too weak. Her kidneys were failing, too. Two weeks, and her body succumbed to all the pestilences that afflicted her body.

Her body succumbed, but not her spirit, not her faith. She is with her Lord; she is awaiting the resurrection of her body and the life everlasting. I talked to Desha's husband, Steve, the evening that she died. Was he troubled? Of course. Was he defeated? Was he despairing? He was not. He believed in God; He believed in Jesus. Desha confessed it too. Oh, I'm sure, like the centurion whose son had an unclean spirit, Steve prayed for strength: "*I believe; help my unbelief*" (Mark 9:24). But he also confessed his faith to me, saying, "how do people get through such time without faith," that is, without the hope that we have in Jesus.

And there was no arrogance in his voice; there was no scoffing — unlike in the commercial I heard the other day as I was listening to the news. "Unabashed atheist" Ron Reagan promoting the Freedom from Religion Foundation arrogantly proclaimed that he was "not afraid of burning in hell." Of course, he wouldn't agree, but the scoffing is misplaced, and one day, like it or not, his knee will bow and his tongue will confess "*that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*" (Phil. 2:10), but not to his salvation.

There was none of that in these humble servants. Both she who died and he who walked with her through "*the valley of the shadow of death*" (Ps. 23:4) trusted in Jesus' promise: "I've prepared a place for you"; "*I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.*" She knew, and he knows the way to the Father's house. They trusted Jesus, "*the way, and the truth, and the life.*" Is there grieving? Undoubtedly, but not grieving without hope. As St. Paul says, "*since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep*" (1 Thess. 4:14).

His was a lament for those who have no hope. I'm not sure, but probably Ron Reagan thinks death is just the end. Nothing more. How sad! And I didn't hear any fear in our brother's voice ... just faith even in the face of death, as we confess when we sing: "Lord, let at last Thine angels come, To Abr'ham's bosom bear me home, That I may die unfearing; And in its narrow chamber keep My body safe in peaceful sleep Until Thy reappearing. And then from death awaken me, That these mine eyes with joy may see, O Son of God, Thy glorious face, My Savior and my fount of grace. Lord Jesus Christ, my prayer attend, my prayer attend, And I will praise Thee without end" (LSB708:3).

May God relieve all of our troubles, strengthen our faith in both abundance and need, chase away all fears, and comfort us in the knowledge and hope of our resurrection through Jesus' resurrection victory.

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

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