

17 April 2022
The Resurrection of Our Lord

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“The More Things Change . . .”

Text: Luke 24:1-12; 1 Corinthians 15:19-26; Isaiah 65:17-25

Alleluia! Christ is risen! [*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*] **Alleluia!**

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

No two Easters are the same.

Because the **world** changes. This year there is a war in Ukraine, but fear and uncertainty around the world. Two years ago we had to have multiple services of only ten people each. The changes are not always bad, like these, but it seems they are more often than not.

But not only our world changes, **we** change. For some, this is their first celebration of Easter. For some, the first as husband and wife, the first with a new child, the first without a loved one, or the first in a new home. Some are having to spend this Easter away from home in rehab. Some battling a newly diagnosed disease.

And our **church** changes. Some members have gone, some new ones have come, some come back after long absences. And maybe next year, we'll be in our own place!

But while no two Easter are the same, at the same time every Easter *is* the same. The same truth, the same joy, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The triumph of life over death! That is the truth we celebrate today that makes all the difference, through all the times and places and changes that happen in our world and our lives and our church. Everything else may change - that never does. He never does. And never will.

So Easter is a rock we can count on. Whatever happens. Through all changes. In good times and bad times. In life and in death. It is the rock, center, and foundation of the Church Year. It is the rock, center, and foundation of our lives. As we sang today: *The Strife Is O'er, the Battle Done!* (LSB #464) *Life and death contended, in that combat stupendous, and life won. The Prince of life, who died, reigns immortal* (LSB #460 v. 1).

But on that first Easter, it was a different rock, another kind of rock, **the women** were counting on. The one holding Jesus - a *dead* Jesus - in the tomb. But something had

happened; something had changed. It wasn't where they expected it to be. He wasn't where they expected *Him* to be! This was a day unlike any other for them. At first, they were **perplexed**, confused, when they saw the open and empty tomb. Then they were **frightened** when they saw the two men in dazzling apparel. And then they were filled with **joy** as they went back and told the eleven what they had heard and seen. They were . . . well, they were like the shepherds at Christmas who told everyone what *they* had heard and seen. The shepherds who were so filled with joy at seeing Jesus in the manger. The women were filled with joy when they *didn't* see Jesus in the tomb - because He was risen from the dead! It really was an Easter unlike any other. And unlike any would be again.

The apostle Paul said that as well - that this was an Easter unlike any other. It was a first. The first resurrection. Jesus as the first to overcome death. Jesus as the *firstfruits* of all who have fallen asleep, who have died. Meaning there would be many more after Him. And so this pointing us forward to another Easter unlike any other, when all the dead are raised, death is destroyed, and all enemies put under His feet.

The prophet Isaiah talked about that day, too; that day unlike any other day - not the first Easter, or the Easters after that, but that *final* Easter. When not just people are raised and made new, but *all of creation* is made new. A new heavens and a new earth! With no sorrow or sadness, no sin or death. Only blessing, only peace, only Jesus. Victorious and triumphant.

That's the Jesus **we need**. That's the hope we need. That's the life we need. And the Jesus, hope, and life **we have**. A Jesus who lives and cannot die again, and so is with us through all the changes and chances of life. And with us not just to make our lives better here and now, for a time. Paul says if that's all Jesus can do, if that's all He's good for, then we are to be greatly pitied and have quite the pitiful Saviour - even if we have good lives. Because that good life is going to come to an end. Somehow, someday, sometime. And then what? And what's the point? Of just prolonging - however well - the inevitable?

But Jesus didn't come and didn't die and didn't rise just to give you a better life now - maybe your life will be, maybe it won't. He came and died and rose to make your life *eternal*. To give you a life beyond the reach of death. Life as God created it to be.

You can't blame the women for being perplexed and confused, or the disciples for doubting their story. We struggle with it, too. With death. When war breaks out, when a pandemic spreads, when a loved one dies, when we come face-to-face with our own mortality, we, too, often times . . . We know Jesus is risen from the dead! Yes, we know that. We know His words and promises. We believe. We know His forgiveness and life. And yet still, when death is no longer sometime in the future, but now . . . when death is no longer a possibility, but a reality . . . when death jumps up and smacks you in the face

. . . it's hard, isn't it? The struggle real.

Which is why Jesus came to defeat death for us. And why we have so much joy this day - because He has!

That when the doctor says six months, which seems more like six minutes, we have the hope and joy of Jesus and a life without end.

That when beside a grave that is six feet deep, which might as well be six million miles deep, we have the hope and joy of Jesus and the promised reunion of the resurrection.

And having such confidence for the **future** enables us to live **now**. So that we not be so afraid of dying that we are afraid of living. That we not be so afraid of the future that we neglect the present. That we not be so afraid of what *might* happen that we miss what *is*.

Some people say that to make the most of your life, live every day as if it was your last. Make the most of every opportunity. That's one way one to look at things. But because of today, because of Easter, we can also live every day as if it was your *first* - like you have all of life before you. Because you do! You have a glorious future in Jesus. You have a life that will not end. So you can be like that newborn child. She has no worry about death. He isn't worried about what will happen tomorrow. They just live. Because Mom and Dad are taking care of everything. You too. As a baptized child of God. Because Jesus took care of everything.

And then *when* death comes, whether it come suddenly or slowly, was a surprise or was expected, be it from old age, accident, natural disaster, or man-made disaster, whenever, however, it comes to you, then *you* will have an Easter unlike any other. For you will fall asleep here and wake up with Jesus. And you will live. Free from all sin, free from all evil. You'll be home. Victorious and triumphant in Jesus.

So today we celebrate an Easter unlike any other, and at the same time the same as every other. We've come through a Lenten season of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, of discipline and growth, and we've come to the joy of Easter. We do it every year, knowing that one year it will be our last. That one year, *we'll come to that Easter that has no end!* For the **sin** that separates us from God has been taken away, atoned for, forgiven, by Jesus. The **death** that separates us from life has been defeated and conquered by Jesus. And the **devil**, who wants to separate us from God and life and one another and all good has been trodden down by Jesus, and is under His heel. So what is left for us but life and joy?

So with that word and promise and confidence, we come now to our Lord's Supper, this foretaste of the feast without end. We receive a taste of eternity, for we receive the Body and Blood not of a dead Messiah, but of a living Saviour. Here is the Body and Blood

that atoned for your sins. Here is the Body and Blood that rose from the dead. Here is the Body and Blood that trampled down the old evil foe. Here is the Body and Blood of victory and triumph. And you are what you eat. So you are forgiven, you are triumphant, you will rise and live forever.

So today, all of history, all our lives, all our hopes, all our dreams, all our fears and confusion, are swept up in one little phrase: **Alleluia! Christ is risen!** [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!] And the more things change, the more that stays the same.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.