

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Easter Sunday, April 12, 2009

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Hymns: 200, 187, 192, 205, 189
Lessons: Isaiah 12: 1-6, 1 Corinthians 15: 51-58, John 20: 1-18.
Sermon Text: Psalm 118: 14-24.
Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

In the name of our risen Savior, dear friends:

We have sung our hymns this morning to express our great happiness. We have sung:

"Awake, my heart, with gladness,
See what today is done;
Now, after gloom and sadness,
Comes forth the glorious Sun." (The Lutheran Hymnal, 192)

The gloom and sadness of Jesus' terrible suffering and death because of our sins is now replaced with the exceeding great joy of Christ's resurrection from the dead. That's why we say to one another today: Happy Easter!

Nothing can make us quite so happy as to be sure that after all our pain and sorrow in this vale of tears; we shall have eternal life in heaven. As believers in Jesus we have this sure hope, and can say with Paul the Apostle: "*We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.*" 1 Thessalonians 4:14. It is on the basis of God's Holy Word that we can say with Martin Luther:

"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 hallelujah." (The Lutheran Hymnal, 195)

So it is that we, on the basis of our text want to express:

OUR EASTER JOY AND SONG OF PRAISE.

- 1. The despised Savior has been exalted;**
- 2. Though we are severely chastened and go through death, we have life eternal; and,**
- 3. Therefore, we praise the God of our salvation.**

The despised Savior has been exalted! That truth is expressed in these words of Psalm 118: "*The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone*" (or cornerstone). This verse was quoted by our Savior when he preached to the unbelieving Jews. This verse was quoted by Peter after the crippled beggar was healed, when Peter preached to the rulers of the Jews: "*It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. He is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.'*" Acts 4:10-11 Peter also quoted this verse in his first Epistle: "*For in Scripture it says: 'See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.'*" Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not

believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,"" 1 Peter 2:6-7.

The builders referred to in this verse are the Jewish rulers and religious leaders, the chief priests, elders, and teachers of the Law. The "*stone the builders rejected*" is Jesus.

The building referred to is the Holy Christian Church. As far as the Jewish leaders were concerned, Jesus was like a stone that didn't fit anywhere in the building and had to be rejected. They couldn't stand Jesus because he reprimanded them and rebuked their work-righteousness. They would not believe that the despised Man from Nazareth could be their Messiah. So they planned and brought about Jesus' suffering and death.

But this despised and rejected One has been highly exalted by God the Father. He was made the "capstone," the "headstone," the "chief cornerstone." God the Father exalted his Son and made him the most important part of the building we call the Holy Christian Church. An unknown author wrote:

"Christ is our Cornerstone, On Him alone we build;
With His true saints alone The courts of heaven are filled." (The Lutheran Hymnal, 465)

The psalmist says "*The Lord has done this and it is marvelous in our eyes.*" The Lord did this when he raised up his Son from the dead in highest glory on Easter Sunday morning. The Father raised up his Son and sent his angels to tell the women at the tomb: "*Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.*" Matthew 28:5-6. This was the mighty event which has astounded people of all ages and gladdened the hearts of believers through the years. Though the unbelieving Jewish rulers would not accept the fact of Jesus' resurrection, and though many in unbelief reject the fact today, it is a most firmly-founded historical fact. And the risen Savior is the exalted Lord of the Church. God's Word says: "*God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name.*" Philippians 2:9. On Jesus the risen Savior everything that has to do with our salvation depends, "*for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*" Acts 4:12

This is a very special truth in which we rejoice today as we celebrate Jesus' resurrection. For on the basis of this we learn from our text that **though we are severely chastened and go through death, we have life eternal.**

2.

The psalmist says in our text: "*I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the Lord has done. The Lord has chastened me severely but he has not given me over to death.*" That God chastens or disciplines his believers is a fact of life. The Bible says: "*The Lord disciplines those he loves.*" Hebrews 12:6. Luther writes: "No matter when or how it happens, we learn here that the saints must wrestle with the devil and fight with death, whether by persecution or pestilence or other sickness and mortal danger." (Luther's Works, Vol. 14, p. 85) Believers in Christ are persecuted for the sake of God and His Word. Luther says this "involves the devil himself. He can tolerate neither the Word nor those who keep and teach it. He besets them in life and in death." God allows Satan to do this. (Luther, *ibid*, p. 84) God in his wisdom sends and permits all kinds of sicknesses, problems, troubles and heartaches upon his beloved children in Christ. And finally, at whatever day and time the Lord chooses, he takes them from this life and they are placed in the grave.

What shall we do, then, when all these persecutions come upon us, when all these troubles upset us, and finally when the hour of death comes to us? Then we have one supreme comfort - "*I know that my Redeemer lives and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God.*" Job 19:25-26 God sends all our earthly troubles and problems for this very reason, that we might do as Paul says: "*Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*" Colossians 3:2 The Lord does not

want us to be worldly-minded, and especially he does not want us to be filled with worries and fears about the future. He wants us to concentrate on the great truths of Jesus' resurrection. The Bible says **"He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God."** Romans 4:25-5:2

It is because of Christ's glorious resurrection from the dead that we can say with the psalmist in our text: **"I will not die but live."** Unless the Last Day of the world comes first, we must all reckon with death and the grave. **"But,"** Paul says, **"Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."** 1 Corinthians 15:20. The Head cannot rise and leave his members dead! With Paul we can proclaim **"Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."** 1 Corinthians 15:54-57

We shall rise from the dead to live forever! What a precious hope we believers in Christ have! Therefore, as our text teaches us, **we also praise the God of our salvation.**

3.

"This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." The "day" our text speaks of is this New Testament period of grace and salvation when we can hear the blessed message of salvation in Christ. Because we have heard the Gospel of Christ the crucified and risen Savior, we want to praise the God of our salvation. Our text helps us: **"The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous: 'The Lord's right hand has done mighty things! The Lord's right hand is lifted high; the Lord's right hand has done mighty things!'"** The Lord's power has done it all. By his grace the Father sent his Son to redeem us. Because of his great love for us, Jesus willingly suffered and died and shed his blood to redeem us. By the power of God's mighty Word, the Holy Spirit has created faith in our hearts so that we can say that the Lord Jesus is our Savior. By his mighty power, God raised up his Son from the dead. By his mighty power as the true Son of God, Jesus rose from the dead. We are assured by that resurrection that Jesus is the true God and that all his Words are true. We are assured by that resurrection that we are justified in God's sight and shall live to all eternity in heaven. Our Savior has promised: **"Because I live, you also will live."** John 14:19. Should not shouts of joy and victory resound in our dwelling places and in our houses of worship today?

Therefore, on this Easter festival we surely want to give thanks to the Lord, and say with the psalmist in our text: **"Open for me the gates of righteousness; I will enter and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous may enter. I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation."** Christ's righteousness has become our righteousness. God declares it as a fact in the resurrection of his Son. We today do not stand before the Lord boasting of our own righteousness, of all the deeds we have done! We bow in humility and say: Christ is our righteousness! In the pure white robes of righteousness we have because the blood of Christ has cleansed us from all our sins, we can look forward with confidence to our death. We can stand before the Lord on the Last Day in those pure white robes and be sure that we shall receive the gift of eternal life in heaven. Let us, therefore, say:

"Thanks to You, O Christ victorious! Thanks to You, O Lord of Life!
Death now has no power over us; You have conquered in the strife.
Thanks because You did arise And have opened Paradise!" Amen. (The Lutheran Hymnbook 207, v. 2)