

CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

Ps. 47:1 – 3

Ps. 33: 5

Ps. 16: 4, 5

Ps. 118: 4 – 6, 8

Ps. 33: 3, 6

Scripture reading: 1 Cor. 15:1 – 23, 47 – 58

Text: LD 17

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Our Lord Jesus did not only die on our behalf, He was also raised from the dead on our behalf. Not only are we united with Him in His death, but through faith we are also united with Him in His resurrection.

The resurrection of Christ is unique, because it is the resurrection of our Mediator. The greatest wonder of Christ's resurrection is that it was a resurrection on our behalf, and for our sake. It is through **His** resurrection from the dead that **we** have the assurance of eternal life.

But how did His disciples come to understand this gospel?

We read that He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. He said to them:

“...‘These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that **all things must be fulfilled** which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.’ **And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures**” – Luke 24: 44,45.

He reminded them of the Law of Moses, and the Prophets, and the Psalms. He reminded them of the promises given in the old covenant, in order that they may understand His death and resurrection as the fulfilment of the promises.

We have to understand more than just the mere fact that Jesus was raised from the dead. Yes, His resurrection is indeed a historical fact. His apostles were eyewitnesses of His bodily resurrection; and the historical fact of His bodily resurrection has been revealed to us. It was also necessary that He showed His disciples the marks in His hands and feet. But that was not enough. It was not enough for them to touch Him and for Him to eat the broiled fish and honeycomb before their eyes to prove to them that He is not a Spirit.

No, the most important thing for them was the moment when Christ opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.

Then, for the first time, the truth of His resurrection dawned on them. It was then that they started to understand. It was when Christ opened up the Scriptures to them that they started to marvel, and to say to each other:

“Did not our heart burn within us while He talked to us...and while He opened the Scriptures to us? – Luke 24: 32

It is then that our heart starts burning within us, when the Scriptures are opened to us.

Even His disciples, who knew Him so well, could not truly see Him without Scripture. They could not understand the meaning of His resurrection merely by looking at Him. But they started to see Christ's glory when they realised: **He** is the fulfilment of all God's promises!

May the Lord do the same for us this afternoon that our heart may start to burn within us as we see the wonder of Christ's resurrection!

I proclaim the gospel to you with the theme:

Christ was raised on our behalf

We will note...

1. That by His resurrection we are justified
2. That by His resurrection we are made alive
3. That His resurrection guarantees our glorification

In the first place we note that...

By His resurrection we are justified

Dear congregation, we all sinned in Adam, and we all died in Adam.

When Adam was excommunicated from God's presence, **we** were excommunicated.

When Adam transgressed God's commandment he became afraid of God and fled from His presence.

“...they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and His wife hid themselves from the presence of God...” – Gen. 3: 8.

The presence of God terrified them, and rightly so, for they were guilty; guilty to death.

And so Adam's excommunication was more than just leaving the garden. He was excommunicated from God's presence. Paradise was lost, not only because the gate to the garden was closed behind him; no, he was sent away from the glory of God's presence.

“The way to the tree of life” was closed off – Gen. 3: 24.

That excommunication from the presence of God meant death, for that is exactly what death is: separation from God. It is not by coincidence that sin causes death. It is not by coincidence that God chose to send Adam away. The separation was a **necessity**, for God can have no communion with sin. Therefore the sinner **must** depart from before Him.

And any departure from God means death.

As long as we are in sin, the gate to the presence of God is locked. And so, *in Adam* we face nothing but excommunication and death. But as terrible as it is to be in the first Adam, as glorious it becomes to be in the second Adam. The gospel of salvation is that God provided us with another Head, a second Adam, the Head of a new human race: our Lord Jesus Christ.

Before the gate of Paradise was closed behind Adam and Eve, they received a promise of victory. God revealed to them the holy gospel of our Lord Jesus there in Paradise; and through Him the gate of Paradise was opened again. Through Him we may again enter into the glory of God's presence.

Through Christ we may see God's face and live.

Now, the apostle Paul tells us that God has done this for us through the resurrection of Christ. He speaks about Abraham and he says:

“He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore ‘it was accounted to him for righteousness’. Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. ***It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offences, and was raised for the sake of our justification***” – Rom. 4: 20 – 25 (the Greek text may and should be translated “for the sake of” and not “because of”).

Christ was raised from the dead for the sake of our justification.

And what is justification?

Justification is to be declared righteous before God.

But how could that be possible for the holy God to declare us righteous? How could we again enter His presence as just and righteous?

Excommunication from His presence is the punishment for sin, and therefore there is only one way back, only one way to enter again. There is only one way to life, and that is: to remove all sin and guilt from us!

As long as we remain in sin, death has the victory over us. But, when our sins are forgiven, death has no power over us.

This is illustrated by the apostle Paul in the passage that we read from 1 Cor. 15: 56 where the apostle compares death to something like a scorpion with a poisonous sting, when he says:

“The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law”.

You have to visualise for yourself a poisonous creature with a sting. It is with its poisonous sting that it kills its pray. Now, death is called our enemy, and death itself is compared to something that attacks its pray with a sting full of deadly poison. And the apostle says that the poison whereby it kills us, its very sting, is our own sin:

“The sting of death is sin...”

The apostle adds to this that the strength of sin is the law. That means that sin is powerful to destroy us, because the **law** says: if you sin you shall die.

God’s law provides the legal ground and the power for death to destroy every transgressor of God’s holy law.

Our own sin is the sting of death. It has great power to kill us, for the law says: if you sin, you shall die.

Yes, the perfect law of God pronounces God’s curse on everyone who departs from God.

How then does God deliver us from death? How are we freed from our sins and from death? How did Christ procure our victory over death?

There on Calvary death made its attack on Christ. Never has death ever found a man covered with so much sin! The sin of the whole world was on Christ. He became sin for us – 2 Cor. 5: 21. Never was the sting of death loaded with so much power to kill. There on Calvary it became death's fiercest attack ever, when the sting of death was loaded with all the deadly poison of the sins of the whole world. But what happened?

There on the cross all the demands of the law were satisfied, and our guilt paid to the full. There on Calvary the sting of death has been removed.

Christ stripped death from its armour by removing our sin.

But you may ask: What does this have to do with Christ's resurrection?

Well, when the Catechism simply states that Christ has overcome death **by His resurrection**, it is not speaking of His resurrection as a fact on its own. His death and resurrection is inseparable. Whenever the death of Christ is mentioned, His resurrection is implied; and whenever His resurrection is mentioned, His death is implied.

It was Christ's sacrifice on the cross that completely satisfied God's wrath against our sin, and through His obedience He fulfilled all righteousness, and **for that reason He was raised from the grave.**

He rose again, because death had no claim on Him. Death has no claim on a righteous man. **Therefore** He rose from the grave.

Now, when the apostle Paul says in Rom. 4:25 that Christ was raised for the sake of **our justification**, it is another way of saying that Christ's resurrection is our resurrection, and His justification our justification.

His resurrection, which is the victory of a righteous Man, is our own. It became our own when we were grafted into Him through faith.

Christ did not only take our guilt away, He did not only conquer death on our behalf, He also arose from the dead in a perfect and glorious life **on our behalf!**

He was our Mediator not only on the cross but also when He rose that Sunday morning. He did not only **die** on our behalf, He was also **raised** on our behalf. He has risen on our behalf

to clothe us with the perfect and glorious life which He has gained by **His** righteousness before God.

That was the reason for **His** resurrection. But it has also become the reason for **our** resurrection unto life. Justified in Christ, we may enter life in communion with God.

Christ's resurrection has become our resurrection, and the reason for His resurrection – which is His perfect righteousness before God – has become the reason for our justification. It is in this way that we are justified by the resurrection of Christ.

But there is still more to be said about Christ's resurrection. His resurrection is not only accounted to us and it does not only provide us with the legal status before God as being justified; the resurrection of Christ has also become an active power in us restoring us unto life.

We note that in the second place, that...

By His resurrection we were made alive

Christ's resurrection is the fountain of our life. **We** live, because Christ, our Head, lives.

By His death we are saved from death, but by His resurrection we receive life itself. By **His** resurrection **we** were raised to a new life in communion with God.

That is the fulfilment of the covenant promise: true life, eternal life, in communion with God in the glory of His presence.

It is through Christ's resurrection that we were made alive unto God. Also our ongoing sanctification from day to day flows forth from Christ's resurrection. Through our union with Him the power of His resurrection is at work in us. By the power of His resurrection we are also from day to day **being raised up** to a new life.

We **were** raised with Him, and we are also **being raised** unto a new life of obedience as we grow in communion with Him and share in His resurrected life.

Yes, we already **have** the new life in Christ, but at the same time we are still receiving this new life from day to day as we grow in communion with Him. The power of His resurrection has made us alive **already**, and at the same time the power of His resurrection works also **in** us, to raise us up more and more to the new life of righteousness.

Dear congregation, this gospel of Christ's resurrection does not change our present life into a fairyland where everything goes well and easy with us. On the contrary, when we receive this new life in Christ, it starts a war within us. Our flesh is enjoying its own sinfulness until we receive this new life. Then our flesh starts a war against the Spirit, and the Spirit wars within us against our flesh, causing a constant conflict within us (Gal. 5: 17).

Christ Himself is warring against the sin of our flesh.

This gospel does not bring us an easy life now and here. Yet, while we experience this war, and are fighting sin to bloodshed, we have peace with God. We fight the good fight of faith not like people who are uncertain, but in the full assurance of victory. Even in the midst of all misery and temptations and hardships, and while we feel that we have no power to stand, this gospel gives us full assurance as we claim Christ's resurrection **as our own**.

Dear congregation, the fact that we were made alive together with Christ also means that it is totally un-Scriptural for the believer to say: "I am unable to do any good". We confess that in LD 3 with regard to our **natural** state **in Adam**, but certainly not with regard to our regenerated state in Christ!

We were made alive with Christ.

Yes, to understand Christian ethics we have to understand our union and communion with the death and resurrection of Christ. When we understand Romans chapter 6 then we have a total different view of Christian ethics than the man who says: "Don't try to be too holy, remember, we are all sinners!" No, the logic of Romans chapter 6 is totally different: you are dead to sin and alive unto God, **therefore** sin shall not have dominion over you. **And:** because sin does not have dominion over you, therefore, **let** it not have dominion over you – Rom. 6: 12.

The apostle is not saying that sin is reigning in the believer and that the believer must now stop sin from reigning in him. No, sin does **not** have the dominion – that is the indicative. **Let** sin not reign – that is the imperative. The **command** (not to let sin reign) is based on the **fact** (that sin does not have the dominion).

It is only because sin **does not** reign that it can be said: **Let** it not reign!

If you would say to a slave: "Do not behave as a slave!" then you are mocking him.

How can you tell a slave not to act as a slave?!

But if the man has indeed been set free from slavery and you tell him not to act as a slave, then you are telling him to put into effect the privileges of his liberation.

In the same way the apostle Paul is telling us: your old man died with Christ and you were raised a new man in Christ, therefore sin does not have dominion over you, and therefore: do not allow it to reign over you!

When he exhorts us, saying: “...**do not let sin reign in your mortal bodies**”, then he is not mocking us. The exhortation simply reckons with the fact that we died with Christ and were also made alive with Him. Our new life in Christ is a fact indeed.

Through the death and resurrection of Christ sin has no dominion over us anymore. We are no longer slaves of sin. And it is on **that** basis that the apostle Paul comes with the command:

“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal bodies...” (Rom. 6: 12)

This is what the Catechism is speaking about when it says that we too are raised up to a new life by Christ’s resurrection. It is a new life unto God, and a new life with God.

It is already the start of eternal life, and a guarantee of the life to come.

We note that in the third place that...

Christ’s resurrection guarantees our glorification

Christ’s resurrection is a sure pledge of **our** glorious resurrection.

Christ’s resurrection assures us of that day when the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, when we will be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.

The apostle Paul speaks of this sure pledge in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 where he calls Christ the **firstfruits** of those who have fallen asleep. It means that He is the first one who received this glorious resurrection. He is the firstfruits of the harvest, and after Him the rest of the harvest will follow. He is the first of many.

Dear congregation, the glory which He entered becomes our own when we are grafted into Him through faith. As Ephesians 2:6 states that **we** were raised up together with Christ, and that **we** were made to sit together with Him in heaven. Whatever happened to our

Mediator, Jesus Christ, also happened to us. If He is seated in heaven, then we too are seated in heaven in Him and with Him.

Through faith we were grafted into Him, never to be separated again.

We shall live, for Christ, our Head, our second Adam, has risen.

“...if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you” – Rom. 8: 11.

Brothers and sisters, the Holy Spirit joins us to Christ through the very preaching of this gospel when we receive it in faith.

Through faith there is an unbreakable bond between us and Christ. The same Spirit who dwells in Him dwells also in us, making us to share in all **His** riches.

O Death, where is your sting? Hades, where is your victory?

In Christ we have won three glorious victories. The resurrection of our Lord Jesus is the **proof** of our justification, the **power** of our sanctification, and a **sure pledge** of that glorious resurrection when Christ will come on the clouds of heaven.

Through Christ’s resurrection the gate to Paradise is open. We may enter into full communion with God. Our Lord Jesus has become the gate, and the way, and the life.

Through Christ’s resurrection we were **raised** unto God; through His resurrection we **live** unto God, and through Christ’s resurrection we **shall live forevermore**.

Amen.