

*P Christ is risen!*  
*C He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

We just heard the culmination of Jesus' redemptive work in this Gospel narrative and we affirm the movement from very dark to very hopeful and very joyous Easter narrative when we exult: *Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

And we like the beloved disciple who runs to the tomb after Mary Magdalene tells him that the stone had been removed from the tomb, we too have arrived at the tomb and I pray that we too see and we believe. We do not hear in the Gospel narrative what the beloved disciple believes, we do not hear anything about what he saw, we just know that "he saw and believed."

Obviously, this morning you all have arrived at this tomb...so welcome on what I believe to be the most Holy of Days within our Liturgical calendar. I pray that as you look around this tomb today and partake of the worship liturgy that you too will see and believe and like Mary...then go from here and tell the others...whoever they may be...that you have seen the Lord!  
*Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

This Easter narrative about the grave along with the characters at the grave and their reaction to this empty tomb all form a visual reality that becomes influenced and colored by our culture. That reality shapes what we conjure up in our mind's eye, however, this narrative also shapes a theological reality to this story as well. Martin Luther preached of this theological reality on Easter Sunday morning, March 28, 1529. In his sermon on that morning Luther proclaimed this:

Thus, sin is completely taken away in the Resurrection. Everyone should learn this today, that all of us should abandon thoughts about ourselves and should not pass judgment on ourselves (or others) according to our feelings. For this is contrary to Christ and the Gospel, which says Christ has taken away the sin from our hearts and consciences and laid them on himself. For this reason, the apostles praise the resurrection unceasingly. We should also do (the same) because the flesh is too evil, Satan too powerful, and the conscience too slow for us to learn to look at Christ and not ourselves.<sup>1</sup>

*Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*...means that we believe that our sin, my sin and your sin is taken away in the Resurrection. But it also means that those we don't like who also believe...their sin is taken away...those out there who live a different life style who believe...their sin is taken away...those out there who we judge as undeserving but yet believe their sin like mine and like yours is taken away. This is why Luther says that all of us should abandon thoughts about ourselves and should not pass judgment on ourselves (or others) according to *our feelings*, because we see ourselves before we see Christ.

In the reality and in the influence of our culture we see the flesh or the person before we even see faith and by doing so we miss the reality of forgiveness and salvation in the resurrection we

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<sup>1</sup> *The 1529 Holy Week and Easter Sermons of Dr. Martin Luther.* St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999. Quote from Luther's Easter Sunday Morning sermon, March 28, 1529, The Resurrection of Christ and Its Meaning. Page 127. Parenthetical comment my own because I feel if Luther is telling us not to judge ourselves how then can we begin to judge others.

share in Christ. Faith does not function as our culture functions. Faith does not look like the person who embodies it...faith is what causes us to believe that Jesus Christ has taken away my sin...your sin...and their sin.

But to many times we see the person and hold on to the sin and ignore the faith...to many times we abandon the person because we draw our conclusions about that person with our judgment colored by our culture. We hold fast to the "person" because we cannot see the soul or the faith of that person. In other words, we all see the tomb (our cultural perspective) that our judgment places that person in instead of the theological perspective of the resurrected grace and forgiveness of Christ in that person or the faith within that person that frees them of sin the same way in which my sin is taken away.

Hans Urs von Balthasar, a Swiss theologian, and Catholic priest who died in 1988 and is considered one of the most important Roman Catholic theologians of the 20th century wrote this about our faith and practice:

Faith is a movement of the entire person away from (the) self, through the gift of grace; thereby (the person) lays hold of the mercy of God, given (them) in Christ – in the form of the forgiveness of sins, justification, and sanctification. In the movement from (the self, one) has done all that they, through grace, can do, and has done all that God requires of them.<sup>2</sup>

When I think about this I see our struggle between the cultural reality of a person verses the theological reality of grace in that person...and I see this in the natural reaction taking place in Mary's actions toward Jesus in today's Gospel narrative:

<sup>13</sup> The angles said to Mary, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." <sup>14</sup> When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup> Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." <sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). <sup>17</sup> Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

I may be taking some liberties with the text but I cannot help but to feel the emotion of this passage in that Mary has lost someone she loved dearly and now stands face to face with him after his death. I think I can safely say she tried to embrace him...I certainly would have. Mary's struggle with the visual reality and the theological reality is emotional and not judgmental like most of ours may be. But this is the visual image and the emotional image that the narrative would shape for us. Mary like each of us cannot see Christ just as we cannot see Christ in others. However, the theological reality says not to hold onto what we see, to let our faith move us away from our self, our desires, to have faith in what we cannot see.

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<sup>2</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *In the Fulness of Faith, On the Centrality of the Distinctively Catholic*. This passage is taken from *For All the Saints, A Prayer Book For and By the Church, Vol. I* in the appointed readings for "Tuesday of Holy Week" page 954. Parenthetical words are changed from masculine to the general.

To have faith in the fact that Christ is risen...sin is completely taken away. I believe at this moment in this narrative, Mary does not understand the resurrection and wants to hold onto what she knows and loves...and that is the physical reality of Jesus. But Mary shows us what Luther said, the conscience is too slow for us to learn to look at Christ and not ourselves...or our desires, our emotions, and our judgments. Mary is wanting to hold onto the Jesus she knows and loves rather than letting faith move her to see the resurrected Christ or the theological reality she is confronted with. This theological reality is explained this way in the Epistle to the Hebrews:

<sup>1</sup>Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

<sup>2</sup>Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. <sup>3</sup>By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible. (Hebrews 11:1-30)

Through our faith we know that sin is completely taken away in the Resurrection. But here is what makes Faith as a movement of the entire person away from the self through the gift of grace so difficult for us to get our heads around. We see the power of faith that takes away our own sins because we know the depth of the sins we have committed, the things we have done wrong, the things we have let undone...we know our faults, our own faults, and our own most grievous faults and we can thankfully move past them. But we do NOT know nor do we see the faults of others and that bothers us...and what we choose to see causes us to judge them and see them as unworthy. It's like someone complaining that something is manipulated in a bad way by saying, "I know the system is rigged because I use the rigged system for my own benefit." It's OK if I use a rigged system to better myself, but you better not because that is unfair.

The grace of God is not limited by our cultural paradigms and perspectives, God's grace and love is made clear in the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ who has died and who has risen to free us all from our sin, yours and mine and theirs. This struggle between our cultural perspectives and a theological perspective happens in the resurrection of Christ as well.

The risen Christ did not appear in the palaces or the temples of the rulers, the kings, the Pharisees, or the scribes...nor did he appear to Pontius Pilate to spite him or to say, I told you so. No, he was raised and appeared to powerless, marginalized folks like Mary, Peter, the beloved disciple John, along with Thomas and the other disciples in Galilee...a peasant backwater town known for political unrest, banditry, and tax revolts. Jesus Christ appeared to the very ones who betrayed and disappointed him in the first place, the same knuckleheads with whom he shared his last meal with and even washed their feet knowing that they would betray him and deny him. In this, we see that the visual and the theological reality of the resurrection are linked by forgiveness.

And once again today, we are reminded that at *this* very tomb we call St. Paul Lutheran Church, our faith in this Holy Word by our in this Holy Meal, during this Holy Liturgy, the risen Jesus Christ appears before us to move us in Word and in Sacrament past our sin that has been taken from us and moves us to the new life we share in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Today despite the cultural realities that influence us we encounter the crucified Jesus as resurrected in this worship and made present to sinners like us in Word and in Sacrament. May

our faith then move us to discover God as forgiving love that is the promise of new life. He did not simply rise from the dead; he rose from the dead for us and for our inheritance of His glory just as St Paul reminded the church in Ephesus:

<sup>11</sup>In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, <sup>12</sup>so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup>In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; <sup>14</sup>this is the pledge of our inheritance towards redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

In the reality we celebrate this day, our sin is completely taken away and we share this glory by letting our faith move us to proclaim, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*