Easter Day 2020

Jeremiah 31: 1 – 6 The LORD Will Turn Mourning to Joy

**“At that time, declares the LORD, I will be the God of all the clans of Israel, and they shall be my people.” Thus says the LORD: “The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness; when Israel sought for rest, the LORD appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you. Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel! Again you shall adorn yourself with tambourines and shall go forth in the dance of the merrymakers. Again you shall plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria; the planters shall plant and shall enjoy the fruit. For there shall be a day when watchmen will call in the hill country of Ephraim: ‘Arise, and let us go up to Zion, to the LORD our God.’ ”**

What seems like an obscure passage on Easter Sunday calls us to take a deeper look. Jeremiah is not writing to wandering Israelites coming out of the Exodus but to captive Israel in Babylon. So the people who survived the sword does not refer to survivors of the armies of Egypt but of Babylon. Who does He mean when He says that He will be the God of all the clans or tribes of Israel? The answer lies in verse 7 where it says: O Lord, save your people, the remnant of Israel. The true Israel is the Church of God which refers to Jewish and Gentile believers in the Messiah Jesus. So the joy of dancing by tambourines cannot refer to the joy of the Jewish exiles returning to Jerusalem. The rebuilding cannot refer to Jerusalem’s walls or the replanting cannot refer to new vineyards in Samaria but is pointing beyond to a permanent rebuilding and an eternal vineyard that reaches beyond the earth. God declares His eternal love for His church. God will build His church. He is referring to virgin Israel! Israel is she who is unstained by sin and death. It does not refer to those in Israel who blasphemed the name of the Lord and committed spiritual adultery with pagan gods but to the faithful who were not swayed by lies but persevered in the salvation of God.

God has always loved his own. He will restore the bodies of believers in the resurrection. Virginity is a spiritual purity by faith in Jesus whose holiness and righteous are the church’s glorious dress. In the Resurrection of Jesus, the foundation is laid to build the church. In the Resurrection on the Last Day, our mortal bodies are rebuilt and we shall see God with our own eyes.

Isn’t this welcomed news for us who are currently shrouded in the darkness of not knowing what our lives will look like after the pandemic? The church’s foundation of our Lord’s resurrection returns joy to us who sorrow over whether our economy will be rebuilt or whether our jobs will be waiting for us or whether our savings will be enough. What is sure is that death is defeated. Sin is atoned and our eternal dwelling in a new body is certain based on Christ’s resurrection.

Chris is Risen! He is Risen indeed! Hallelujah!

Colossians 3:1 – 4

**“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.  Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.  For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.  When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”**

We have been raised with Christ when He baptized us. The Small Catechism (Fourth Part of Baptism) teaches that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

Jesus died the big death on the cross when He was forsaken. That is the big death that our baptism has delivered us from and so we can say with certainty that as much as Jesus can never ever die again so will we never die but live in Him forever.

Given that, we have a new perspective that is eternal. When St. Paul wrote that we are to seek therefore the things above, he does not want us to walk with uplifted heads all the time. How does one seek the kingdom of God? It is not found in the clouds above but in the Word of God down here, in the promise and power of our baptisms down here and in the blessed cup and bread of Communion down here.

As much as it pains us now that we cannot come together as the New Israel and seek God’s favour in the preached word and in the sacrament of the altar, the days will come when we can. How great will it be to see the church lit, to sing hymns and to seek the Lord where He promised to be found? The things that occupy so much of our minds now are only part of this fallen world and Easter points us beyond to focus on the things that are eternal, blessed and more than we could imagine or deserve.

The life of a Christian is hidden with Christ in God. Beyond the sorrow of self-isolation and not being with our families and so many of our Easter traditions curtailed, our life in Christ remains strong, yet hidden. Life in Christ is most certain even in the midst of the world’s denial of the Resurrection by our baptism into Christ where we were raised from the dead and live with Him.

The Christian’s hidden life ends when we shall see the glory of Christ. It will happen when He returns. Then we too shall share in His glory. The church will then appear with Christ in glory. This is our Easter triumph and joy.

Matthew 28: 1- 10 The Resurrection of Christ gives us great joy

**Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.  And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.  His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.  And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men.  But the angel said to the women, “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. Come, see the place where he lay.  Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.”  So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.  And behold, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him.  Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”**

The tomb of Jesus was sealed with a large stone and with Roman guards. The high priest and Pharisees wanted to prevent his disciples from stealing the body. How ironic that the high priest and Pharisees actually heard Jesus say that He would rise again in three days while the disciples were more overcome with fear and disbelief.

It is good that the Lord’s tomb was secured because it magnifies the glory of His Resurrection. The Risen Christ is exalted above all earthly power and jurisdiction. If the posted guards were terrified of the earthquake when the angel rolled the stone away from the tomb, what will happen when the exalted Lord of angles and man comes with immeasurable glory?

Christ was gone before the angel rolled the stone away. He passed through rock at will as He now shines with eternal glory. All things are laid at His feet. That includes time and space.

The Risen Jesus makes all things new again. New bodies, new heavens and a new earth. This is true even though we can not see it and so many mock and ridicule Him. The guards reported to the chief priests of the earthquake and the shining angel at the empty tomb. The chief priests bribed them to tell others that the disciples did in fact steal the body. How much money does it take to cover up the Resurrection of Christ? The text is silent on the matter but there was plenty of money to go around and as the chief priests were ready to bribe Pilate so that he would not punish these guards.

Today many disbelieve the resurrection and dismiss it as an unverifiable miracle. The lies about Jesus continue. May we never give in to popular opinion that discredits the bible’s account of the resurrection and even more important not live as though the resurrection is not a big part of our lives.

The resurrection of Christ is the foundation of our faith. All our faith is based on it. Our teaching and our lives flow from it. It was the source of joy for the women who heard the angel’s preaching that the crucified Christ was not there but is risen. The women were afraid of being in the presence of one of God’s holy angels as any of us would be but their fear was overcome with the angel’s words: Do not be afraid.

Only the forgiveness of a Risen Lord can take all our terror away. The angel’s words gave that forgiveness to the women and then lifted their hearts in pure joy as they ran to tell the disciples what happened.

Can we still have that joy as they had? Is joy possible when Easter is not celebrated as we would like? Can there be joy with our uncertain future over the corona virus?

The answer lies in the empty tomb. The answer is heard in the words of absolution. Are you baptized into Christ? Then you have a new mind set, you are part of the church of the living Christ, raised with him to a new life. The answer is yes.

The Risen Christ is our Joy. We are raised with Him in baptism and brought into the New Israel. Our faith in Him is founded on his promise that he would rise again in three days and so our hope will not fail. Christ was put to death for our sins and raised for our justification. Our future in Him is certain and glorious. His resurrection still gives us great joy!

Easter Collect: Almighty God the Father, through Your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, You have overcome death and opened the gate of everlasting life to us. Grant that we, who celebrate with joy the day of our Lord’s resurrection, may be raised from the death of sin by Your life-giving Spirit; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.