



LIVING WORD EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Evangelical • Reformed • Catholic

Resurrection Results

Romans 6:3-11

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April 11, 2009 – Easter Vigil

We started this past Sunday a journey, as we walked into Jerusalem with the disciples of Jesus. We walked next to him, waving palms and proclaiming, “Hosanna!” and “All glory and honour, to thee redeemer King!” We joined the Messiah on his triumphal march into the holy city. On Thursday we sat with the disciples as they joined Jesus for supper in the upper room. We were there as Jesus took bread and wine, gave it to his disciples to eat, and declared to them, “This is my body. This is my blood. This is the new covenant.” We pondered the mystery of sacrifice. Yesterday we followed with the disciples as Jesus led them to the garden to pray, we saw Our Lord’s betrayal by Judas, we saw his sham trial before the high priest, we saw him dragged before Pilate, the governor, who saw no fault in Jesus, but washed his hands of the whole thing as the people shouted, “Crucify him! We have no king but Caesar!”

Finally, we followed as Jesus was led by the soldiers to Golgotha, nailed to a cross, died in agony, and was buried in a tomb. We read the lesson from the book of Hebrews yesterday where the writer explains to us that what happened on the cross was the same sacrifice that Jesus told his friends about on Thursday night in the upper room. That whereas the priest under the old covenant stood before the altar each and every day to offer sacrifices for sin that could never atone in and of themselves, but pointed to a greater sacrifice that could and would, Jesus Christ, our great High Priest offered himself as a once-for-all and perfect sacrifice for sin. Where the priest had to go back and stand before the altar day after day to make offerings for sin, Jesus did it once and now sits at the right hand of the Father.

We saw Jesus yesterday, lifted on the cross, and stretching out his arms to invite us to new life in him, so that he can take through the torn veil and into the Holy of

Holies – into the presence of God. He takes us into the place we could never go before as sinners...because by his perfect sacrifice he has washed us clean.

And now tonight, Easter Eve, we recall God’s great acts and promises of redemption – and then we followed his friends to the tomb, where they found the angel sitting on the rolled-back stone proclaiming the now *empty* tomb, “Don’t be afraid, for I know that you’re looking for Jesus who was crucified. He isn’t here. He has risen, just as he said he would!” Tonight we hear the Easter message: Jesus didn’t just die for our sins, but he rose from the dead victorious over sin and death. The Resurrection gives us the message that it’s not enough for God, through Christ, to merely forgive our sins – to wipe the slate clean. The story doesn’t end with Good Friday – with Jesus dead and in the tomb. The story continues with Christ *victorious* over sin and death and the message that when we put our faith in his perfect sacrifice we are made dead to sin and alive to new life. Look at our epistle for this evening: Romans 6:3-11.

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Our baptism is the Sacrament, the sign and seal, of our union with Christ, just as the Lord’s Supper is the sign and seal of our continuing life in Christ. The body and blood are what give us our nourishment, but before we have that, in our baptism we are united to Christ. Baptism is the funeral and the burial of the old sinful self. As we receive the external sign of washing with water, the Father fills us with his indwelling Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts and minds. Our baptism proclaims that as we are united with Christ, we are *also* made dead to sin.

Each of us stood condemned to the wrath of God because of our sins, but on Good Friday the blood of Christ flowed from the cross and washed our sins away, allowing us to enter the holy presence of God uncondemned. But Christ’s sacrifice also *frees* us from the power of sin and through the work of his Spirit enables us to live new lives that are free to do the good

works God has called us to. The cross is more than fire insurance – much, much more. St. Paul goes on:

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Romans 6:4-11)

I don’t know how to make it any clearer than St. Paul does. We’ve been united with Christ in death, and if we’ve experienced death with him on Good Friday, we’ll also “certainly,” as he says, be united with him so to experience his Resurrection on Easter too. Neither death nor sin has dominion over us anymore. And yes that means eternal life and perfection someday on the other side of judgement day, but it has application for the here and now too. Look at the verses that continue after our “official” lesson:

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. (Romans 6:12-14)

Paul goes on for the next couple of chapters in Romans to talk about the fact that even though we’ve been given new life, our old sinful natures are still with us. But here, before that, he tells us: “Because you are united to Christ in his death, and because you are united to him in his Resurrection, you are free from the dominion of sin. You’re not its slave anymore!” And the practical upshot of that is this: “Don’t let sin reign in you! You’re free! So don’t get caught up in its passions!”

You see, the evidence of new life in Christ – the evidence of the indwelling Spirit – is a desire to do what’s pleasing to God. Paul says, “Don’t present yourselves to sin as a tool for unrighteousness – that’s the old you. But present yourselves to God, having been bought from death and brought to life, and be tools, vessels for righteousness. You no longer stand condemned by the Law, but live in the grace of God!”

I’m convinced our problem – our struggle with holiness here – is that we too often take our eyes off of Christ. Thursday we had a chance to renew our focus on his body broken and his blood shed for us. Yesterday we had the opportunity to reflect and renew our focus on the cross where his sacrifice was made for our sakes. And between yesterday afternoon and this evening, I hope that we’ve all had a chance to be taken by the outstretched hand of Jesus, the hand with the scar from that big nail, and be led by him into the Holy of Holies – into the presence of the Father. Because it’s as Jesus holds our hand and we remember that it’s only through him, who died the death that we deserve, that we can come into God’s presence. And we also need to stand in awesome wonder in the holy presence of Almighty God to fully grasp our own unrighteousness and the weight of the grace and mercy we’ve been shown. That, friends, is what drives us to holiness. We give ourselves as living sacrifices, not legalistically and not out of duty. We give ourselves to God, becoming instruments of righteousness, out of gratitude for the great love that has been shown to us.

Please pray with me: Almighty God and Father, we come before you tonight to give thanks for the amazing work of grace that you did for us through your Son, Jesus Christ, when he gave himself on the Cross for our sins. But Father, by the work of your Spirit living in us, keep us ever mindful that our sins aren’t just forgiven – you’ve taken away sin’s dominion and called us to holiness. Give us the grace to walk in holiness, driven to serve and please you out of gratitude for the great love and mercy you have shown to us. We ask this in the name of Christ. Amen.