

**Raised with Christ**

Colossians 3:1-4 &

St. John 20:1-10

Fr. William Klock

March 31, 2013 – Easter Day

*Alleluia! Christ is risen.**The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

Of all our prayers and acclamation in the liturgy, those words proclaiming the Resurrection of Jesus are the best. They're the words we wait for from our celebration of his birth at Christmas, anticipating the redeeming work he came to do at the Cross, and they're the words we remember from Easter onwards as the rest of the Church Year teaches us what it looks like to live the reality of his Resurrection in our own lives. And that's what our lessons are about this morning: the reality of the Resurrection.

The Gospel lesson, as told by St. John, is simple. Surprisingly, for St. John, it's not doctrinal. It's just *there*. And yet it doesn't need to be anything more than just *there*; it's the *Resurrection*. John tells us that early on that first Easter morning, Mary went to the tomb. Because of the Passover and the Sabbath, Jesus had been put in the tomb without having been fully or properly embalmed. Mary went to finish that work. But when she got there, she found the heavy stone put there to seal the door rolled away. We don't know if she looked inside or not. John says it was still dark and it would have been even darker in that little cave. She may have just assumed that the body was gone seeing that the tomb had been opened. Whatever the case, John says, she ran as fast as she could to Peter's house, waking him up along with John. Thump, thump, thump! On Peter's door and those rapid-fire, tear-filled words: "Peter! They've taken the Lord out of the tomb! We don't know what they've done with him!"

Peter and John then ran to the tomb. John tells how he outran Peter to get there. It was just barely day by then and he stooped to look into that little cave. It still would have been fairly

dark inside, but in the half-light he couldn't see a body. That's when Peter caught up. Peter got down on hands and knees and crawled into the cave. Sure enough, no body. And yet he found the linens in which Jesus had been wrapped lying there and the cloth that had covered his face neatly folded and set aside. It sounds like John couldn't believe what Peter called out to him from the tomb, so John got down on hands and knees and squeezed in beside Peter. And John says, "He saw and believed."

But believed what? The Gospel? That Jesus has conquered sin and death? That Jesus had risen from the grave? No. The end of John's account of that first Easter morning is actually pretty anticlimactic. What did they believe? They believed that the tomb was empty as Mary had told them. That's all. John says that they didn't yet "understand the Scripture that he must rise from the dead." Jesus' body was gone. That was that. Troubling? Yes. Distressing? Yes. But what could they do about it? John says they simply went home. That's John's account.

And yet in John's simple telling he gives us *proof* of what happened. He gives us three *witnesses*: Mary, Peter, and himself. And none of those witnesses expected Jesus' body to be gone. Mary was going to embalm his dead body. She was shocked to find the stone rolled away. Peter and John were just as shocked to hear her story and had to confirm it for themselves by running to the tomb and climbing down into it. Even after they confirmed that Jesus wasn't in the tomb, they didn't know what it meant.

And John gives us three *signs*, three pieces of evidence that can only be explained by the Resurrection.

The heavy stone used to seal the tomb had been rolled away. Jesus' friends hadn't rolled it away, not with soldiers guarding it and Mary, Peter, and John show us their surprise at finding the tomb open and empty. Many have argued that maybe Jesus, when they put him in the tomb, wasn't really dead. He'd simply passed out from trauma and loss of blood. He came to and escaped, they say. But someone in that state or even in a healthy state, couldn't have moved the stone and certainly not with the guards outside.

The empty grave gives us more proof. What other explanation could there be? His friends didn't take him. They were as surprised as anyone that his body was gone. And if it was all a lie on their part, consider that most of them died martyrs' deaths for their deception. Liars don't take their lies that far. Neither the Jews nor the Romans took the body. If the Jews had taken him they'd have been the first to produce the body when the disciples began preaching the good news that Jesus has risen from the dead.

And John also tells us how he and Peter found the tomb in order. The linen wrappings were still on the shelf where the body had been laid and the cloth that had covered Jesus' face was folded and set aside. Grave robbers, whether Roman, or Jewish, or Jesus' friends wouldn't have bothered to unwrap the body. In fact, they would have had every reason to keep him wrapped up. And that kind of deliberate neatness isn't consistent with the idea of Jesus reviving from sleep and stumbling out of the tomb, barely alive.

No, everything points to the reality of Jesus' Resurrection. No other explanation fits the evidence and even the evidence we've been provided in the Gospels gives us every reason to believe that it's reliable. And it's on this evidence that our faith rests, with the Resurrection of Jesus at its centre. The Church puts the evidence before us every Easter—to confirm that the saints who awaited his Advent did not hope in vain, to confirm that he did not come himself at Christmas in vain, to confirm that he did not fulfil the righteous obligations of the Law in vain, and—most important—to confirm in us the forgiveness and new life that his death and resurrection accomplish in all those who believe; to confirm that we do not believe in vain!

But what *does* Jesus' resurrection mean for us? Why is it so important? That's where our Epistle picks up. Look at Colossians 3:1. St. Paul says there:

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

St. Paul *applies* Jesus' resurrection to *us*. And if Jesus resurrection is

somehow applied to us, that means that it transforms us as it transformed Jesus. At this point it helps to back up a little bit. Our Epistle from the Easter Vigil last night explains what's going on here. In Romans 6:3-4 St. Paul asks:

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.

You see, St. Paul understood that our Baptism unites us to Jesus. It's what puts us inside the Covenant that he established. It's the certificate of new birth that denotes us as citizens of the kingdom of heaven. In the Gospel message, Jesus offers us forgiveness of sins and new and eternal life. All we need to do is admit that we are dead in our sins and enemies of God, that we are powerless to deal with or overcome our sins on our own, and then trust that Jesus has dealt with our problem by dying in our place and rising from the dead. All we need to do is believe...*trust*. And we do so by passing through the waters of Baptism. On Pentecost the men heard Peter preaching this Good News and they asked: "We believe. What do we do now?" And Peter told them: "Repent and be Baptised for the forgiveness of your sins." Over and over we see this example: the Gospel is preached, men and women believe, and they respond in Baptism. As God offered Abraham his Old Covenant through the outward rite of Circumcision, which was an act of faith; God now offers us his New Covenant through the outward rite of Baptism. In it he makes us a promise; we take hold of it—we pass through the waters—in faith, trusting in his promise of forgiveness and life.

In those waters the work of Jesus is applied to us. Our old sinful selves die and new life is poured into us. In Baptism we are crucified and raised with him. And so in our Baptism we take part in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Think about what that means. It means that these waters forever change us. Paul says later in Romans 6:10-11:

For the death [Christ] 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.

"You must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." Is your life characterised by a death to sin and by being alive to God? If you've taken hold of the promise God offers in Baptism, this should be you. Maybe someone took that step of faith for you before you were even capable of belief. That's fine. That's Biblical. That's what believing, covenant parents are supposed to do for their children. That's what Covenant parents have done since Abraham. If you haven't done so already, now is the time for you to believe yourself—to take hold for yourself of the promise that God has already sealed to you in that Baptism. (Maybe you haven't believed at all yet. Maybe you've never passed through the waters of Baptism. If that's you, the Gospel promise of forgiveness and new life is offered to everyone through these Baptismal waters. Simply believe and take hold of them for yourself through Baptism.) Brothers and sisters, whatever the specifics of your situation, what Paul's saying is that in our Baptism we are united with Jesus in his death and resurrection; we are dead to sin and alive to God. We who were once dead *in* sin and rebellious enemies of God are now dead *to* sin and reconciled to him.

But, again, is your life truly characterised by a turning away from sin and a turning towards God? This side of eternity none of us will ever be perfectly holy. We still sometimes stumble and fall. Sanctification, the process of purging sin and being made holy is just that: a process. The difference for the person united to Jesus is that while we may still sin, we are no longer *slaves* to sin. We have a choice. The very fact that we so often regret our sin after the fact, the very fact that we desire perfection and to please God is the evidence that our bondage to sin has been broken and that we have been made alive to God.

But because we aren't yet perfect, it's easy to become discouraged. It's easy to doubt the reality that we have been raised to new life with Jesus. In fact,

the Enemy will often grab hold of our failures and throw them back at us. It's for good reason that he's known as "Satan". His name is Hebrew for "the Accuser". He loves nothing better than to hold our sins in front of us and make us doubt our redemption. This is why God makes our salvation so easy; it's why he's given us tangible signs. I don't remember my Baptism; I was a baby. But my Baptismal certificate is framed and hangs on my office wall. When I doubt—when you doubt—all you need to do is ask: "Do I trust that Jesus died for my sins? Do I trust that he rose from the grave to make me alive to God?" If the answer is "Yes" and if you've passed through the waters of Baptism, you need no greater assurance. If you believe and if you've been Baptised it is a *fact* that Jesus has made you dead to sin and alive to God.

And so St. Paul says in our Epistle—again, in Colossians 3:1:

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

This is what the Resurrection means for us. This is our calling. It's also the solution to the sin that is still so often a reality in our lives. You have been raised with Christ, so focus your mind on things above—on the things of Christ. Does a freed slave carry around his manacles hoping for some chance to put them back on? Does a recovered drug addict carry around a needle or a crack pipe hoping that someone will come along and give him a fix? Does a blind man who has received his sight still carry his cane or does a deaf man who has received his hearing still wear a hearing aid? No and no. The surest way to keep falling back into the sin from which we've been freed is to keep carrying it around, to keep focusing on it, to keep playing with it, to keep putting ourselves in situations where it tempts us. Instead, Paul says in verse 2:

Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

Elsewhere, Paul puts it in terms of putting off the old and putting on the new. A lot of Christians look at their old lives and look at sins that have

been problems for them and simply try to set them aside...and then they fail. They keep picking them up again. The key is to set those sins aside and to *replace* them with righteousness. It's not enough to put off the old self, you've got to put on the new. If you don't put on the new, putting off the old leaves a void and that void usually ends up being filled with the same "old" thing that used to be there. Set aside sin and take up righteousness. Set aside sinful thought and take up memorising Scripture or meditating on the things of God. Set aside sinful habits and replace them with holy ones. "Set your minds on things that are above."

And, again, Paul reminds us of the reality of our Baptism:

For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.
(Colossians 3:3)

And that means that our struggle against sin is temporary. Look at verse 4:

When Christ who is your life appears [when he returns for his people], **then you also will appear with him in glory.**

Dear friends, we have a future hope. This the "already, but not yet" aspect of our faith. It is a fact that we are dead to sin and alive to God through Jesus Christ, but it's also true that we are still waiting for the completion of that work. In 1 Corinthians 15, St. Paul tells us that when Jesus rose from the grave, he became the firstfruits of the resurrection of the dead. The firstfruits represent the *beginning* of a harvest. There's always more to come. And that's the case with the resurrection of the dead—there's still more to come. Jesus preceded us and ascended back to heaven to rule his kingdom. He's given us the Holy Spirit in the meantime to unite us to himself, to sanctify us and make us holy, and so that we can do the work of building his kingdom here on earth. But his promise is that he will return and when he does, the rest of the resurrection harvest will be brought in and we will be made perfect in our humanity as he has been made perfect in his.

And so, brothers and sisters, live out the reality that is yours in Christ Jesus. Live in the assurance that in your Baptism you were made dead to sin and alive to God. Put off the old sinful self and put on the new by putting aside sinful actions and attitudes and, instead, seeking the things that are above, replacing the old with the things of Jesus and his kingdom—with love and good works. And live in hope that the Resurrection begun by Jesus that first Easter morning will be completed when he comes again. Remember St. Paul's exhortation: "If we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his."

*Alleluia! Christ is risen.
The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

Let us pray: "Almighty God, you have conquered death through your dearly beloved Son Jesus Christ and opened to us the gate of everlasting life: grant us by your grace to set our minds on things above, so that by your continual help our whole life may be transformed; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit in everlasting glory. Amen."