

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

The celebration of Easter continues today, and it will for 5 more Sundays after this, rightly so. Easter is the Christian feast of feasts.

Therefore, resurrection is still in view today. It's still the third day, the Sunday after Jesus' death. Last Sunday's Gospel had the women coming to the tomb early in the morning; this Sunday's Gospel takes place later on that same day.

That evening the resurrected Jesus came and stood again in the midst of the disciples. Now we must admit: the resurrection of Jesus was an amazing sign; it was a miracle. The women had reported it back to the apostles that morning ... the tomb was empty; the body was not there. They told the apostles what the "*two men*" had told them: "*He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, ... the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise*" (Luke 24:6-7), but the apostles did not believe them.

That unbelief called for more signs ... remember, that they had witnessed many before this, even the resurrection of Lazarus. Nevertheless, they were filled with unbelief.

Therefore, Jesus came and stood in their midst. But what exactly stood there, after all, the doors were "*locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews*"? Was it a ghost? Surely ghosts, disembodied spirits, can get by a locked door, but not flesh. But what happens next and again in the following week instructs us that it was not a ghost that appeared to the disciples, but Jesus in the flesh who came and stood there. That's why the tomb was empty; that's why the body was gone. Jesus had risen from the dead; He stood up and exited the tomb.

And that evening, Jesus, who bore the marks of His crucifixion, stood there before them. "*Peace be with you,*" He said to them. This is what His cross and death had won for them. "*God ... through Christ reconciled [them] to himself*" (2 Cor. 5:18). As we sing: "All our debt Thou hast paid; Peace with God once more is made: O Lord, have mercy!" (LSB617:2). And He sent them forth with this message of peace and of the forgiveness of sins. Here is what the church is about — proclaiming forgiveness of sins by the blood of Jesus to those who repent of their sins, but binding sins to the unrepentant as long as they do not repent.

And to shore up the weak-kneed disciples in the task ahead of them, Jesus showed them "those dear tokens of His passion" (LSB336:3), the wounds in His hands and His side. For them, seeing was enough. It was Jesus, who had been crucified, standing there. He was living! "*We have seen the Lord!*" And we know

how the disciples went forth into all the world with this Divine message of forgiveness, life, and salvation in Jesus, crucified and risen from the dead.

Still, how can a body do such things? If you're thinking that, you're not the first. In fact, some claim that Jesus' "resurrection" was only as a ghost — nothing but spirit. They use St. Paul's statement "*It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body*" (1 Cor. 15:44) and other similar passages to assert it. But Paul is talking about a body here. Dr. Greg Lockwood has a helpful quote in his commentary on 1st Corinthians: "It is ... unlikely that Paul means by [spiritual body] a 'body made up of spirit.' That would be a non sequitur [it doesn't follow logically], since Paul elsewhere assumes that spirit is immaterial. He means, rather, that the resurrection body will be animated and empowered by the Spirit ..." (Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, p. 308, quoted in Lockwood, *Concordia Commentary: 1 Corinthians*, p. 590). That's how our bodies will be in the resurrection. We will be "animated and empowered by the [Holy] Spirit". As Luther says, our bodies will be "nourished and preserved spiritually by God and [have] life entirely in Him. ... [Ours] will be a completely spiritual existence, or life, of the whole person, covering both body and soul" (*Luther's Works*, 28:189-90).

No, one cannot use such passages to discard the resurrection of Jesus in the flesh. In fact, Luke reports that when Jesus came and stood among them, the disciples were afraid, because they thought they were seeing a ghost. But Jesus told them explicitly: "*a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have*" (Luke 24:39). And He invited them to touch Him.

So how does flesh and bone enter into a locked room? Luther is helpful here, too, for he reminds us that, as both God and man, Jesus could utilize different modes of presence. The first mode of presence he calls "the circumscribed corporeal mode of presence, as when He walked bodily on earth, when He occupied and yielded space according to His size." In this Gospel, when Jesus showed the disciples His hands and side, that was this first mode of presence. The second mode Luther called the "uncircumscribed, spiritual mode of presence according to which He neither occupies nor yields space but passes through everything created as He wills"; and this is the mode that He used when "He left the closed grave," Luther said. You know this. The stone was not rolled away to let Jesus out of the grave, but to let the women and disciples peer in. And, Luther said, Jesus used this mode of presence when He "came through closed doors" (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article VII, 99-100). Thus when the resurrected Jesus, flesh and bone, not just a ghost, passed through those closed doors, He did another sign; He did it twice, in fact.

I already mentioned that Jesus showed the disciples His hands and side. They saw the wounds and believed. But Thomas wasn't with them on that first evening,

and he refused to believe their report. He wanted more. He wanted to touch the wounds in Jesus' hands and side. And one week later, he had just that opportunity. Jesus came and stood among the disciples again, and He turned His attention to Thomas. "Come here, Thomas. Touch me. Here are my hands. Put your finger here in the nail wound. Put your hand in my side."

So, why all this? It was that they might believe: "*Do not disbelieve, but believe*"; but also that they might believe rightly. Ghosts don't have bodies, spiritual or otherwise. They are disembodied spirits. Jesus had a body, with flesh and bones, a body that the disciples could see and touch.

For us, too, it's not only important that we believe but also that we believe rightly. The things that we believe about Jesus are important, St. Paul says: "*I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve ...*" (1 Cor. 15:3-5).

We confess these things as "necessary for everlasting salvation" — that "The third day He rose again from the dead" (Apostles' Creed), that "the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures" (Nicene Creed), that "He "rose again the third day from the dead" (Athanasian Creed).

Thomas was convinced and confessed: "*My Lord and my God*" — Jesus the crucified is living again, body and soul. It's what we are given to believe and confess, too, for it's what Jesus had foretold; it's what the Scriptures say; it's what the Christian church has always taught and always believed.

Jesus did many signs during His three-year ministry on earth, starting with the changing of water into wine at the wedding at Cana. Then He told of the destruction of the temple and His raising it back up. What did these mean? The disciples didn't understand until the sign of Jesus' resurrection from the dead illumined them. "*When therefore [Jesus] was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken*" (John 2:22).

So all of His signs do for us, especially the resurrection. And John records them for us that we "*may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing [we] may have life in his name*" — eternal life now, and resurrected life on the last day. God grant us this faith, and God strengthen this faith as we receive that risen body and blood in the "sign" Christ gives for our forgiveness, life, and salvation (Augsburg Confession, XIII, 1-2).

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

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