

“THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY”
The Resurrection of Our Lord (Easter Matins)
April 17, 2022
Zion Lutheran Church
Fort Wayne, Indiana

TEXT:

*I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last He will stand upon the earth.
And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I
shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.*

Job 19:25-27 (ESV)

Many years ago I read a book written by a very liberal theologian who bluntly denied the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. He wrote: “The resurrection was not something that happened to Jesus, but something that happened to the faith of His disciples. In other words,” he went on, “the myth of the resurrection still saves, if you have faith enough to believe that myth is sometimes closer to truth than is history” (*Charles Francis Potter, The Lost Years of Jesus Revealed, page 9*). That author was saying that the miracle of Easter is not that Jesus rose from the dead (since we all know that such things don’t happen), but rather that His disciples actually believed that He rose from the dead. It always amazes me when I encounter clergymen who don’t believe what they are supposed to be preaching. Why would a man waste his entire career and the majority of his lifetime studying and preaching something that he doesn’t believe?

The resurrection of Jesus Christ has always been a stumbling block to worldly-minded people because it totally contradicts our experience, which tells us that when people die, they remain dead. My parents and only sibling have died through the years. And if you were to go to Cedar Hill cemetery in Baltimore, Maryland, you would see that their graves remain unopened. And if someone were to open those graves, I am confident that what’s left of their bodies would still be there and still be lifeless. This reality, a common one, has caused many people through the ages to downplay the idea of bodily resurrection. The early Church, for example, was faced with a heresy called Gnosticism, which taught that everything material is evil--that only the spiritual is good. Consequently, the Gnostics denied the resurrection of the body, as well as the incarnation. Unfortunately their influence can still be seen among some Christians today, as is evident in that so many Protestant churches deny the Sacraments. But in this morning’s text Job, despite his deteriorating physical condition, expresses confidence that, even though he will die and decompose, he will live again--not as some disembodied spirit, but as the same person that he already is: a person made up of body and soul. Let’s listen to his words on this Easter morning to rediscover how we, too, can believe that our Redeemer lives and that we can trust in Him because of that glorious fact.

Like Job, we can know that our Redeemer lives. His resurrection from the dead is attested to by many eyewitnesses--and these eyewitnesses are credible.

To me, one of the strongest pieces of evidence for the bodily resurrection of Jesus is the behavior of His disciples before and after His crucifixion. When Jesus was arrested, these men were so terrified that all of them (except John) ran away and went into hiding. John alone stood at the foot of the cross with Jesus' mother. And yet these same frightened and timid disciples, just a few weeks later, were boldly proclaiming that their Master had indeed risen from the dead, even though they were threatened with persecution and death if they did so. Where did that boldness come from? I have no doubt it came from the fact that they had actually seen the risen Christ and knew for a fact that He was alive. That boldness resulted in all of them (except John, once again) dying a martyr's death. They would only be willing to suffer such a fate if they were absolutely convinced that Jesus had risen and that His message was worth proclaiming even if it meant death to them.

The resurrection of Jesus is, in fact, the vindication of His earthly life and ministry. It is the indisputable proof that He really is who He claims to be and that everything that He did and taught is valid and true. In raising Him from the dead God the Father was proclaiming to the whole world that Jesus is indeed His "beloved Son, with whom [He is] well pleased" (*Matthew 3:17*)--the One who perfectly fulfilled the will and Law of God--the One who offered to God the only acceptable and perfect sacrifice that made full and complete atonement for the sin of the world and reconciled sinners to their God and Father. What the resurrection does is that it assures us that the One in whom we trust is One who is worthy of our trust and that we can rest assured that the promises that He made to us are sure and certain ones.

It was this knowledge of the reliability of God the Father and His coming Redeemer that enabled Job to say: "I know that my Redeemer lives." And it is this knowledge that enables you and me to sing these same words with conviction on this Easter Day. Despite his suffering, his declining health, and his decaying body, Job had the confidence to say: "After my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another." He wasn't longing for death in the sense of being "put out of his misery," as so many people in our current culture of death like to say. Even though he lived centuries before Jesus died and rose again, Job believed in God's promise of bodily resurrection for all who trust in His redemption. You and I can have that same confidence because of the resurrection of the One who has promised us: "Because I live, you also will live" (*John 14:19*).

Because Jesus has been raised from the dead, we, like Job, can be certain that we also will rise, since we have been united with Him in His death and resurrection through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. There is no question about it. This body, which decays with age and will decay even more after death, will be raised to life again and will be made perfect to live in glory forever in union with the slain and risen Christ and with all who have lived and died trusting in Him. That's why we confess in the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in . . . the

resurrection of the body" (*Apostles' Creed, Article III*). The Christ who took on human flesh has redeemed the body as well as the soul. He has not scorned the material, as so many well-meaning but misguided people do today; He has embraced it and redeemed it to be what the Creator intended it be from the very beginning: a perfect creation living in perfect harmony with its Creator and with itself.

Today is all about the fact and the faith of the Christian Church. The fact is that Jesus died and rose again. The body that was removed from the cross and laid to rest in Joseph's tomb was really dead and the risen Christ who appeared to His disciples three days later was not a ghost or a phantom or a figment of their imagination; He was the same flesh-and-blood Jesus that they had walked and talked with for three years. The faith that is founded on this historical fact of Jesus' resurrection is that what He says that He did for us He actually did. He truly did "fulfill all righteousness" (*Matthew 3:15*) for us and suffer the consequences of sin in our place so that we, who through sin had made ourselves God's enemies, are now forgiven of our sins and reconciled to Him. It also means that, no matter what may befall us in life, even death itself, we will live again--body and soul--in glory forever. We can know this as surely as Job did--and even moreso--because we know that Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Amen.

May the God of peace, who brought again from the dead that great Shepherd of the sheep, our Lord Jesus, by the blood of the everlasting covenant equip you thoroughly for the doing of His will. May He work in you everything which is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, to whom be honor and glory forever and ever. He who calls you is faithful, and He will do it. Amen.