

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

We're still in the midst of Easter, but this far into the season we have moved beyond Jesus' resurrection appearances to the Church's proclamation of that resurrection. You heard it today. The apostle Paul proclaimed it; the apostle Peter proclaimed it; we proclaim it. The Divine Service today began with this proclamation as Abel John was baptized and united with Jesus in a death like His, so that we can be sure that he will "*be united with [Jesus] in a resurrection like his*" (Rom. 6:5). Salvation washed over Abel John today so that we might be certain that, with Jesus, "*death no longer has dominion over*" him, that he might live as one "*dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus*" (Rom. 6:9, 11).

You know these verses; they come from Paul's letter to the Romans and they bear witness: Paul preached the resurrection. We see it in our first reading for today. We find Paul in Athens, the city with those beautiful structures dedicated to their mythical gods and goddesses. The most famous structure is probably the Parthenon, dedicated to Athen's patron goddess Athena. Luke reports that Paul's "*spirit was provoked within him*" by this "*city ... full of idols.*" Therefore, he began to reason with the Jews and others in the synagogue and in the marketplace, with anyone who would listen, telling them of "*Jesus and the resurrection.*"

This resurrection talk caught their interest. Even "*the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers*" wanted to hear more. They took Paul to the Areopagus. Perhaps that means to the rock hill where supposedly Ares, the Greek god of war, had "been tried ... by the gods for the murder of Poseidon's son." What nonsense! It's sometimes referred to as "Mars Hill" because the Roman god of war was Mars. But more probably this means that Paul was brought before the Council of the Areopagus because of its "special jurisdiction in matters of morals and religion" (*Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 1:108).

Regardless, Paul presented his case for the true God, not idols made of "*gold or silver or stone.*" He made His case for the Creator and Preserver of all things, not something imagined by the mind of man and fashioned by his hands. He made the case for God as our Father and we as His "*offspring,*" as Abel John was made a follower and child of God today. He made his case for the God who would one day judge the world through His Son, whom He raised from the dead. He made his case for the God who "*is actually not far from each one of us.*"

Some mocked Paul's preaching, but some wanted to hear more, and some believed and became disciples. Prominent among them was "*Dionysius the Areopagite*" (Acts 17:34), that is, one of the Council members. The preaching of

Christ crucified and risen from the dead, the preaching of Christ, who is not far away but comes to us even now, moved this Gentile to believe in Jesus.

Peter similarly preached Jesus' cross and resurrection: "*Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.*" And although Jesus is risen and "*has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers,*" yet He is with us, saving us by the water connected up to His resurrection — baptism. "*Baptism ... now saves you ... as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ*"

Christ is with us as He Himself promised, as we gather, two or three in His name, to hear the preaching of His cross and resurrection, of forgiveness and life (Matt. 18:20). Christ is with us as He promised, as we partake of the Holy Supper. And, to be sure, "*as often as [we] eat this bread and drink the cup, [we] proclaim the Lord's death*" (1 Cor. 11:26) — that is, we confess that we eat of Christ's body sacrificed unto death on a cross; we confess that we drink of His lifeblood poured out there. But we also confess that this body and this blood are from the "living Christ" as Melancthon writes in the Apology (X:57) and points us to Romans: for "*Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him*" (Rom. 6:9).

In all these ways, Jesus could say, as He prepared to ascend to the Father, "*behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age*" (Matt. 28:20). This is what Jesus was teaching His disciples as He was preparing them for His death and resurrection and departure to the Father. Not only would He come again one day to take them to the Father's house, but He would also come to them through the work of another Helper whom He would send.

Surely Jesus came as our Helper and Friend, as our Savior and Redeemer, but He says, as I depart, I will send you another Helper, the Spirit of truth. And I will come to you through His work and will manifest myself to you through His work. For although we know that in Christ is life (John 1:4), and He declares that He is the Life (John 14:6) and that His words are spirit and life, we know also the Spirit is the giver of life (John 6:63; 2 Cor. 3:6). He takes what belongs to Jesus and declares it to us (John 16:15).

This is really the work of the Spirit: after Jesus' ascension into heaven to make Him present for us even now. And so the Spirit does it. Carried to us by word and water, the Spirit dwells within us, and by Him, we come to believe that Jesus is our Lord and God and in this believing we are given life (John 20:28, 31) — indeed, apart from the Spirit, we cannot believe; we cannot call Jesus Lord (1 Cor. 12:3). By this same word and Sacraments, the Spirit allows us to see Jesus who comes to

us in these holy things. The world can't see Him, because they don't have the Spirit, but the Spirit has come to us. And so Jesus is made manifest to us in these. By these, He comes to dwell in us, and we in Him. By these, we know and confess truly that "Christ has triumphed; He is living"; and we believe that, because He lives, we also will live.

This is the work of the Helper whom Christ sends from the Father. This is the Spirit's work: to call, gather, enlighten, and sanctify the whole Christian Church on earth and keep it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith (Small Catechism, Apostles' Creed, Third Article). This is the work of the Lord and Giver of life: to bear witness to Jesus, crucified and risen from the dead, who is with us even now. Of course, we're not celebrating the Spirit's day today. We'll celebrate His day in a couple weeks. No, we're still in Easter now, and so, empowered by the Spirit, the Church continues to celebrate Easter and to proclaim the resurrection ... "Christ is risen! Alleluia!"

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