

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

We celebrated Easter last Sunday. We heard how the women made their way to the tomb where the crucified Jesus had been laid, how the stone that had closed up the tomb had already been rolled away, and how the body of Jesus was missing, the tomb empty save only the linen cloths. We heard the Good News from two angels posted at the tomb: “Jesus is no longer dead. He is living.” “*He is not here*”; He “*has risen*” (Luke 24:5-6) — all reasons to rejoice in the resurrection of Jesus. Yes, Christ is risen. Alleluia!

But these aren’t the only “proofs” of the truth that Jesus rose from the dead. There are two more in our texts for today, the first one by inference, the second by eyewitness testimony.

The first we find in our First Reading from the book of Acts. For remember how the disciples were after Jesus’ arrest, mistreatment, and execution? They hunkered down in a locked room “*for fear of the Jews.*” They thought the same demise could be theirs if they were discovered, and so they hid themselves. But shortly — somehow, miraculously — we hear how Peter and the other apostles fearlessly went about Jerusalem teaching and doing miracles. And, yes, they were arrested, but they didn’t stop. And with the help of an angel, they were released and didn’t flee, but returned to the temple to preach Jesus even more boldly — to preach His cross and resurrection even at the risk of further arrest. They told their captors: “*The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.*” When reminded that they were commanded not to preach of Jesus, Peter told them, “*We must obey God rather than men.*” Truly, the truth of the resurrection turned their cowardice into courage.

The second proof is found in today’s Gospel lesson, namely, Jesus’ two resurrection appearances to the disciples. The first happened on the evening of the first day, the day of Jesus’ resurrection. Jesus appeared to the disciples in that locked room. He showed them His wounds, the evidence of His crucifixion, proving that it was He, yet standing flesh and bone before them. The disciples were convinced; they were glad and believed.

Of course, one disciple was missing at that first appearance — Thomas — and he refused to believe the others’ reports. “*Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.*”

The second appearance, we hear, happened a week later. Jesus appeared to the disciples again, and this time there was a special focus on Thomas that removed his — I think understandable — skepticism. “Put your finger in the marks of the nails, Thomas. Put your hand in the wound in my side. Believe in Me.” And Thomas did

believe, and he confessed: “*My Lord and my God.*” And lest anyone think that these are just the hallucinations of distraught, grieving disciples, Jesus isn’t done showing Himself alive. We’ll hear more next week ... about more resurrection appearances. Truly, Christ is risen! Alleluia!

In fact, all that the Old Testament had prophesied, all that Jesus Himself had promised about our salvation had just been accomplished. “[*T*]he Son of Man [*had been*] delivered into the hands of sinful men”; He had been “*crucified and on the third day [He had] rise[n]*” (Luke 24:7). And it was “for us,” as St. Paul said, “*Christ died for our sins ... [and] he was raised on the third day*” (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Again, St. Paul says elsewhere: He “*was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification*” (Rom. 4:25). Christ’s death was a sacrifice of atonement for us; we are reconciled to the Father. We are at peace! Christ’s resurrection was His announcement of the victory. Sin and death have been defeated. We are forgiven. Everlasting life awaits us.

This is what Christ won for us by His passion, death, and resurrection. It’s as Luther wrote: “We treat of the forgiveness of sins in two ways. First, how it is achieved and won. Second, how it is distributed and given to us. Christ has achieved it on the cross, it is true. But he has not distributed or given it on the cross. He has not won it in the supper or sacrament. There he has distributed and given it through the Word, as also in the gospel, where it is preached. He has won it once for all on the cross. But the distribution takes place continuously, before and after, from the beginning to the end of the world. ...

Luther continues, “If now I seek the forgiveness of sins, I do not run to the cross, for I will not find it given there. Nor must I hold to the suffering of Christ, as Dr. Karlstadt [one of Luther’s colleagues who went radical] trifles, in knowledge or remembrance, for I will not find it there either. But I will find in the sacrament or gospel the word which distributes, presents, offers, and gives to me that forgiveness which was won on the cross. Therefore, Luther [he speaks of himself in the third person, here] has rightly taught that whoever has a bad conscience from his sins should go to the sacrament and obtain comfort, not because of the bread and wine, not because of the body and blood of Christ, but because of the word which in the sacrament offers, presents, and gives the body and blood of Christ, given and shed for me.” (*Luther’s Works*, 40:213-14).

Thus, we see in today’s Gospel, after Jesus had accomplished our salvation, He appeared to the disciples in the closed room to proclaim to them that reconciliation that He had won: “*Peace be with you,*” He said, and repeated, and repeated again a week later. “*Peace be with you.*” “I am bestowing peace upon you, the peace I won for you, assuring you of forgiveness in the face of your fleeing, and your denial, and your fears, and your unbelief.” Believe this Good News, and you will be saved, as St. Paul proclaims: “*hold fast to the word I preached to you,*” “*the gospel I preached to*

*you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved”* (1 Cor. 15:1-2). And Paul elsewhere preaches: “‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ... So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:13-14, 17).

Thus, for our salvation, Jesus sends forth His church with the Gospel on their lips: “*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved*” (Acts 16:31), for “*if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved*” (Rom. 10:9-10).

Jesus sends forth His church with “the water included in God’s command and combined with God’s word,” Holy Baptism whereby God makes disciples, “[working] forgiveness of sins, [rescuing] from death and the devil, and [giving] eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare” (Small Catechism, Baptism, Parts 1 & 2).

Jesus sends forth His church with forgiveness on their lips, the keys of the kingdom: “*If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld,*” a forgiveness that especially His ministers are to proclaim publicly.

Jesus sends forth His church with His very body and blood “given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins” — again publicly administered by His ministers. And all this, so that God might give us His “Holy Spirit” and “work[] [saving] faith” in us who receive this Gospel (Augsburg Confession, V:2).

For this is what Jesus is about: He came in our flesh, endured suffering and death, and rose from the dead to achieve our salvation, and He sends forth His Spirit to bestow it upon us. And this is what His church is about: to communicate this blessed Good News to the world through Christ’s chosen means, that we “*who have not seen*” might nevertheless believe and be saved. And this is what God’s Holy Word is about, as the Holy Evangelist St. John proclaims: “*Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*”

O God comfort us by the word Your Spirit has caused to be written, strengthen us in the true faith, and grant that Your word may go forth even from us and bear abundant fruit.

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

Christ is risen! Alleluia!