

In the name of ✠ Jesus. Amen.

For most of us in the U.S., life here on earth is not so bad. It's not that way around the world, with many experiencing physical hardship, persecution, and suffering. Consider South Sudan right now in the throes of a tribal civil war; people killed; women raped; many starving. But we live in relative ease. We become easily attached to our life and all its attractions. We become enamored with our clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all we have. And, to be sure, they are the good gifts of our Creator God who gives us our body and soul, eyes, ears, and all our members, our reason and all our senses, and still takes care of them. Nevertheless, it's easy to make these things into idols.

Thus, rightly did we pray today for our desires to be on the Lord's promises and our hearts to be "fixed where true joys are found." The texts before us, too, remind us that ultimately our true joys are not our home on this earth nor merely the good stuff God gives us. Our earthly home is a temporary home; and even though God richly and daily provides us with all we need to support this body and life, our lives can often be filled with sufferings, and injustices, and sorrows.

Consider Stephen, chosen a deacon. He was a man of "*good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom,*", yet, he was arrested, and tried, and finally killed—stoned—for preaching Jesus of Nazareth, the "*the Righteous One, whom [the Jews] ... betrayed and murdered.*" And he was received into the loving arms of His Savior.

Or consider Peter, who in the verse that follows our text reminds us that we are but "*sojourners and exiles.*" He encourages us to "*endures [our] sorrows*" even if we are "*suffering unjustly.*" And Peter had said this having just reminded us of who we are as Christians: "*a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession.*" We are a people "*called ... out of darkness into his marvelous light.*" We are a people who "*have received mercy.*" But none of that keeps us from experiencing troubles in this world.

Jesus encourages us also whose hearts are easily weighed down. "*Let not your hearts be troubled,*" He said. Why not? Because compared with eternity, the troubles of this life are fleeting. St. Paul calls them a "*light momentary affliction,*" and he says that they are "*preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal*" (2 Cor. 4:17-18).

*“Let not your hearts be troubled,”* Jesus says, for *“our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ”* (Phil. 3:20). We have a heavenly abode, Jesus says, in the Father’s house. And this is no transient thing, but a permanent dwelling place with the Father and the Son. Thus, we are called to set our minds not on earthly things (Phil. 3:19), but on the heavenly, on the place prepared for us by the Son.

And as resurrection people, we do set our minds on things above. For like Princess today, being baptized into Christ, we *“have died, and [our] life is hidden with Christ in God”* (Col. 3:3). Christ is our life, and when He appears, we *“will appear with him in glory,”* and He will take us to where He is, to His Father’s house, to our heavenly home, our permanent home.

This is what we prepare for now in this life. It is said that our life in the church is one big preparation for death, so that like Jesus, death will have no dominion over us. Because of Jesus, death is now for us but the gate of life immortal, so that we can scoff at death and say, *“Death, where is your victory, death where is your sting. ... Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

That doesn’t mean that we don’t grieve at the death of loved ones. Of course, we do. We just do not grieve as others do who have no hope. For we have the hope of the resurrection, that *“since ... Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep”* in Him (1 Thess. 4:14).

It’s why we Lutherans sing with gusto even at funerals—because we’re resurrection people. I’ve had people marvel at how we Lutherans sing at funerals. What a confession we make when we sing, like we will today: *“[Jesus] lives to silence all my fears; He lives to wipe away my tears; He lives to calm my troubled heart; He lives all blessings to impart.”* Or when we sing: *“And take they our life, goods, fame, child and wife, though these all be gone, our victory has been won. The kingdom ours remaineth.”*

That’s how we can *“consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”* Because of Jesus. Because, regardless what happens now, we know that the ultimate victory is ours in Christ Jesus. We are Easter people. Christ has won; He has opened paradise to us; He has gone there to prepare a place for us; He will come again and take us unto Himself, that is, unto the Father.

This is what the resurrection does for us—it’s not just about Jesus’ victory, but ours, too. Jesus’ resurrection is also about our resurrection. And regardless what struggles we’re going through, regardless what fears or tears or troubles,

whether individually or as the church in the world, this is the message that raises us up out of our darkness and into His marvelous light. As the Psalmist reminded us today: *“Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.”* For we are His, His own chosen people. We are God’s people, chosen and precious. We are a house built upon the Rock. The storms may assail us, but we will not fall, for we have received mercy in Christ, and we shall not be put to shame. And Jesus will come again to “graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven.” He will come to take us home, for Christ is risen. Alleluia.

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