

CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

Ps.47:1 - 3

Ps.119: 1 - 3

Hymn 27:1, 2, 4

Hymn 28:1 - 4

Ps.33: 3, 6

1Cor.15:1 - 23, 47 - 58

LD 17

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Our faith is rooted in history. We have before our eyes the revealed history of God's mighty deeds of salvation. But these historical facts, also the fact of Christ's resurrection, are - of itself - not enough to establish us in the truth.

Much more is needed. It has to become clear to us how this historical fact is indeed the very fulfilment of God's covenant promise. The glory of Christ's resurrection is not simply that it was a big miracle. Others have been raised from the dead as well. No, we see the glory of His resurrection only when we see it as the fulfilment of that promise made to Abraham. Only then will the wonder of God's love and faithfulness be seen in these concrete historical facts.

Brothers and sisters, even if it would happen that Christ would appear to us this moment, here in this building, and show us His resurrected body, that would not establish the truth among us. God uses another means to reveal His truth to us.

Christ had to reveal Himself in a different way - even to the apostles who knew Him so well. And how did He do that? How did His disciples come to understand this gospel? ***He opened their minds to understand Scripture.*** As He said to them:

“...‘These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.’ And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures”- Luke 24: 44,45.

He reminds them of the Law of Moses, and the Prophets, and the Psalms. He reminds them of the old covenant, so that they may understand His death and resurrection as the fulfilment of God’s covenant with them.

Brothers and sisters, we have to understand more than just the mere fact that Jesus was raised from the dead.

It is true that the Lord Jesus has shown His disciples His hands and His feet. That was needed too, in order that they could be eyewitnesses of His bodily resurrection. But that was not enough. It was also not enough for them to touch Him and for Him to eat the broiled fish and honeycomb before their eyes to prove to them that He is not a Spirit. No, the most important thing for them was the moment when Christ opened their minds to Scripture.

Then, for the first time, the truth of His resurrection dawn on them. It was then that they started to understand. It was when Christ started to open up the Scriptures to them, that they started to marvel and to say to each other:

“Did not our heart burn within us while He talked to us...and while He opened the Scriptures to us? - Luke 24: 32

It is then that our hearts start burning within us, when the Scriptures are opened to us. Even His disciples, who knew Him so well, could not truly see Him without Scripture. They could not understand the meaning of His resurrection merely by looking at Him. But they started to see Christ’s glory when they realised this: He is the fulfilment of all God’s promises!

May the Lord do the same for us this morning, that our hearts may start to burn within us as we see the wonder of God’s mercy and goodness in the resurrection of Christ.

I proclaim God's covenant promise to you with the theme:

Christ was raised on our behalf

We will note that His resurrection is...

1. Our *justification*
2. Our *sanctification*
3. Our *glorification*

In the first place we note...

His resurrection as our justification

It all started there in Paradise. Adam was excommunicated from the garden. But there was also more to it than just leaving the garden. You will remember that Adam and His wife Eve, after they have transgressed God's commandment, became afraid of God's presence.

“...they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and His wife hid themselves from the presence of God...”
- Gen.3:8.

After they sinned, the presence of God started to terrify them, and they tried to hide themselves from His presence.

Adam's excommunication was more than just leaving the garden. He was excommunicated from the presence of God. Paradise was lost, not only because the gate to the garden was closed behind him, but also the gate to the presence of God.

It was “the way to the tree of life” that was closed off - Gen.3: 24.

Excommunication from the presence of God means death. To be separated from God - that is death. But what was the cause of this separation? Sin! God is the Holy One. He can have no communion with sin. And as long as we are in sin, the gate to the presence of God is locked.

Death is excommunication from the presence of God because of sin.

But before the gate was closed behind them, Adam and Eve received a promise of victory. As we confess in Lord's Day 6 God revealed the holy gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ there in Paradise. Some time ago I preached to you on Gen.3:15, the first summary of the gospel - a gospel that is worked out in its detail in the rest of Scripture.

Christ has come to open the gate of Paradise. Through Him we may again enter into holy communion with God. In Christ we see God's face.

Now, the apostle Paul tells us that God has done this for us through the resurrection of Christ. He speaks about Abraham and he says:

“He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore ‘it was accounted to him for righteousness’. Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offences, and was raised for the sake of our justification”- Rom.4: 20 - 25 (the Greek text may and should be translated “for the sake of” and not “because of”).

He says: Christ was raised from the dead for the sake of our justification.

Now, what is justification?

Justification is to be declared righteous before God.

But how could that be possible for the holy God to declare us righteous? How could we again enter His presence as just and righteous?

Excommunication from His presence is the punishment for sin. Therefore there is only one way to enter again. There is only one way to life, and that is: to remove all sin and guilt from us!

As long as we remain in sin, death has the victory over us. But, brothers and sisters, when our sins are forgiven, the sting of death is removed.

In our Scripture reading this morning we read 1Cor.15:56 where the apostle Paul compares death to something like a scorpion with a poisonous sting. He says:

“The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law”.

What does it mean? You have to visualise for yourself a poisonous creature with a sting. Think of a scorpion. It is with its poisonous sting that it kills its pray. Now, death is called our enemy, and death itself is compared to something like a scorpion attacking its pray. And the apostle says that the poison whereby it kills us, its very sting, is our own sin:

“The sting of death is sin...”

Our sin is the poisonous sting of death.

Then the apostle adds to this that the strength of sin is the law. That means that sin is powerful to destroy us, because the *law* says: if you sin you shall die.

God’s law provides the legal ground and the power for death to destroy every transgressor of the law.

Sin is a poisonous sting. It has great power to kill, for the law says: if you sin, you shall die.

The perfect law of God’s righteousness pronounces God’s curse on everyone who departs from God.

But, dear congregation, Christ took on the battle against sin for us. There on Calvary Christ had the victory. There death made its attack on Christ. Never has death ever found a man covered with so much sin and guilt as with Christ on the cross. The sin of the whole world was on Him. Never was the sting of death loaded with so much power to kill. It became death’s fiercest attack ever, with the poison of all our sins. But what happened?

The day when death was the strongest ever, became the day of its total defeat. There on the cross all the demands of the law were satisfied and our guilt paid to the full. The sting of death has been removed. Christ stripped death from its armour, by removing our sin.

Now, we have to understand this in order to understand Christ’s resurrection. When the Catechism simply states that Christ has overcome death *by His resurrection*, it is not speaking of His resurrection as a fact on its own. The relation between His death and His resurrection has to be noted. His sacrifice completely satisfied God’s wrath against our sin, and He fulfilled all righteousness, and for *that* reason He was raised from the grave.

He rose again, because death had no claim on Him. Death has no claim on a righteous man. *Therefore* He rose from the grave.

Now, when the apostle Paul says in Rom.4:25 that Christ was raised for the sake of *our justification*, it is another way of saying that Christ’s resurrection is our resurrection. His resurrection, which is the victory of a righteous Man, is our own. It has become our own when we were grafted into Him through faith.

Christ did not only take our guilt away, He did not only conquer death on our behalf, He also arose from the dead in a perfect and glorious life on our behalf!

He was not only our Mediator on the cross; He was also our Mediator when He rose that Sunday morning. He did not only *die* on our behalf, He was also *raised* on our behalf. He has risen on our behalf to clothe us with the perfect and glorious life which He has gained by *His* righteousness before God.

Not only His victory over death is accounted to us, also His obedience to the law is accounted to us, so that we are justified before God. That was the reason for His resurrection, but it has also become the reason for our resurrection unto life. Justified in Christ, we may enter life in communion with God.

Christ's resurrection has become our resurrection.

But there is still more to be said about Christ's resurrection. His resurrection is not only accounted to us, it has also become an active power in us restoring us unto life.

We note that in the second place, that...

Christ's resurrection is also our sanctification

Christ's resurrection is the fountain of our life. We live, because Christ lives.

By His *death* we are saved from death, but by His *resurrection* we receive life itself. By *His* resurrection *we* were raised to a new life in communion with God.

There you have the fulfilment of the covenant promise!

Scripture teaches this very clearly to us, especially in Romans chapter 6. Romans chapter 6 draws the line very clearly between Christ's resurrection and our sanctification.

Through Christ's resurrection we were made alive to serve God. And so our sanctification flows forth from Christ's resurrection. Through our union with Him, the power of *His* resurrection is at work in us. By the power of His resurrection we are from day to day being raised up to a new life. In Christ we already *have* the new life; and at the same time we are still receiving this new life from day to day as we grow in communion with Christ. The power of His resurrection has made us alive already, and at the same time the power of His resurrection works also *in* us, to raise us up more and more to the new life of obedience and righteousness in communion with God.

Dear congregation, this gospel does not change our present life into a fairyland where everything goes well and easy with us. On the contrary, when we receive this new life in Christ, it starts a war in us. Our flesh is enjoying its own sin until we receive this new life. Then our flesh starts a war against the Spirit, and the Spirit

wars within us against our flesh, causing a constant conflict in us. Our resurrection in the resurrection of Christ started a war within us, as we read in Gal.5: 17.

Christ Himself is warring against the sin of our flesh.

This gospel does not bring us an easy life now and here. Yet, while we experience this war, and are fighting sin to bloodshed, we have peace with God. We fight the good fight of faith not like people who are uncertain, but in the full assurance of victory. Even in the midst of all misery and temptations and hardships, and while we feel that we have no power to stand, this gospel gives us surety as we claim Christ's resurrection as our own, and as we see also the power of His resurrection at work in our lives.

Through *His* death and resurrection sin has no dominion over us anymore. We are no longer slaves of sin. And it is this very assurance that makes us daily to fight the desires of our flesh and to put to death the lusts that war within us.

This is what the Catechism is speaking about when it says that we too are raised up to a new life by Christ's resurrection. It is a new life unto God, and a new life with God.

In the third place we note that...

Christ's resurrection is also our *glorification*

Christ's resurrection is to us a sure pledge of *our* glorious resurrection.

That day when the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, when we will be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. Of that glorious moment Christ's resurrection is a sure pledge to us.

The apostle Paul speaks of this sure pledge in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 where he calls Christ the **firstfruits** of those who have fallen asleep. It means that He is the first one who received this glorious resurrection. He is the firstfruits of the harvest, and after Him the rest of the harvest will follow. He is the first of many.

The glory which He entered becomes our own when we are grafted into Him through faith. As Ephesians 2:6 states that **we** were raised up together with Christ, and that **we** were made to sit together with Him in heaven. Whatever happened to our Mediator, Jesus Christ, also happened to us. If He is seated in heaven, then we too are seated in heaven with Him and in Him.

Through faith we were grafted into Him, never to be separated again.

We shall live, for Christ has risen.

“...if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you” - Rom.8: 11.

Brothers and sisters, the Holy Spirit joins us to Christ through the very preaching of this gospel when we receive it in faith.

Through faith there is an unbreakable bond between us and Christ. The same Spirit who dwells in Him dwells also in us, making us to share in all *His* riches.

O Death, where is your sting? Hades, where is your victory?

In Christ we have won three glorious victories. For the resurrection of our Lord Jesus is the *proof* of our justification, the *power* of our sanctification, and a *sure pledge* of that glorious resurrection when Christ will come on the clouds of heaven.

Paradise is restored. We may enter into full communion with God. Our Lord Jesus Christ has become the gate, and the way, and the life.

Through His resurrection we shall live unto God, and with God, forevermore.

Amen.