



All Saints Sunday
5 November 2017

Christ is Risen!

Ascension Lutheran Church
Rev. Christian W. Marien

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

I broke the rules today! I know that is no surprise for many of you. I changed the readings for today. I needed to hear the story of the resurrection – to be reminded that Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! To follow Mary to the grave. To hear the angels say, “Do not be afraid. I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He has not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.” Today, we travel in a thin place. We remember the practice of the early Celtic Christian communities that believed that the veil between worlds became permeable. A thin place: a space where past and present and future mingle, and heaven and earth meet.

On this day, I am reminded how standing before God’s altar we can find ourselves at a thin place: how when we gather in that space of memory and story, that space that touches all our senses and where we acknowledge our hungering, it opens up doorways to the past, and those who once shared our table somehow do so again. On this day, who is lingering close in your memories? What stories come to the surface this day? Where do you find those thin places where past, present, and future intertwine, and heaven and earth meet? In these days, may God bless you in this thin place open to you: a space of memory and hope, a realm where dream and possibility meet, a place where those who love you make their presence known and provide sustenance for the way ahead.

The way ahead – for those of us who grieve the loss of someone we love – the way ahead can be, by far, the most difficult direction to travel. I was reminded of Bartimaeus – blind and hungry for God’s concern and tending. Mark tells us that Bartimaeus, sits by the roadside blind and begging. A prisoner of a dungeon he did not choose – locked away and forgotten. For many of us – our grief is the prison we have known. Suffering the loss of someone we love – struggling in our grief – a day, a week, a month, a year, ten years, longer – being told by the world it is time to move on – to find that way ahead – knowing there is freedom ahead – unable to leave the darkness of our dungeons of grief completely. Afraid, that if we leave our grief behind to step into the love



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of our Savior that we are somehow betraying the memory of those we have loved and lost. Afraid that in traveling the way ahead – we will lose sight of what we have left behind thereby losing our loved one all over again. And that is a journey we cannot bear to travel again.

A terrible fire ravaged the whole building, and when, afterwards she went back to inspect the remains of her office all she could do was shake her head and be grateful that she had not been in the building at the time. Certainly none of the files of papers had survived. With one backward glance her eye fell on a tiny smoke and ash stained vase still standing on the charred remains of her desk. She had a new office now in a different place and was able to move in there instead. Well, little vase, she said, you and me have survived and you shall come with me into my new office. It stood in the usual place on the corner of her new desk, but when people came in she noticed a difference in their reaction. Before, they would say, “Oh, what a beautiful vase.” Now, since it had been through the fire, they said, “Oh, what beautiful flowers.”

It turns out that we are the vase in the story. The Apostle Paul tells us in 2nd Corinthians: “we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. ⁸ We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. ¹¹ For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. ¹² So death is at work in us, but life in you.” Ahhh, there is the promise of God my heart needs this day. We are clay jars – ash stained by the power of death in this world. Jesus is the new life that is beautiful within us. Where there is doubt, Lord God, roll away the stone and resurrect my faith. Where there is depression, cast aside my grave clothes, and restore my joy. Where there is despair, chase away my night and bring resurrection light to my hope.

So now, at God’s invitation, come to the table. Come, you who have much faith, and you who have little, you who have been here often and you who have not been here long, you who have tried to follow and you who have failed. Come, because it is the Lord who invites you. Bring



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the grief of your lives to the foot of the cross and lay your broken and crumbled pieces at God's altar. Here God promises to meet you. Here God promises to breathe new life into the length of your days. Here God promises to take you by the hand - to lead you to the way ahead where God promises to walk with you from your doubt, your depression, and your despair to the hope, the joy, the light of a new Easter morning in your life. Thanks be to God! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.