

Preservice Hymn

1 Sing, my tongue, the glorious battle;
sing the ending of the fray.
Now above the cross, the trophy,
sound the loud triumphant lay:
tell how Christ, the world's Redeemer,
as a victim won the day.

2 Tell how, when at length the fullness
of th'appointed time was come,
He, the Word, was born of woman,
left for us His Father's home,
blazed the path of true obedience,
shone as light amidst the gloom.

3 Thus, with thirty years accomplished,
He went forth from Nazareth,
destined, dedicated, willing,
did His work, and met His death;
like a lamb He humbly yielded
on the cross His dying breath.

4 Faithful cross, true sign of triumph,
be for all the noblest tree;
none in foliage, none in blossom,
none in fruit Thy equal be;
symbol of the world's redemption,
for the weight that hung on thee!

5 Unto God be praise and glory:
to the Father and the Son,
to th'eternal Spirit honor
now and evermore be done;
praise and glory in the highest,
while the timeless ages run.

Hymn 199

1 Jesus Christ is ris'n today, Alleluia!
our triumphant holy day, Alleluia!
who did once upon the cross Alleluia!
suffer to redeem our loss. Alleluia!

2 Hymns of praise then let us sing Alleluia!
unto Christ our heav'nly King, Alleluia!
who endured the cross and grave, Alleluia!
sinners to redeem and save. Alleluia!

3 But the pains which he endured, Alleluia!
our salvation have procured; Alleluia!
now above the sky he's King, Alleluia!
where the angels ever sing. Alleluia!

Hymn 151 (1-3)

Christ, the Life of all the living,
Christ the Death of death, our foe,
Who Thyself for us once giving
To the darkest depths of woe,
Through Thy suffering, death and merit
I eternal life inherit:
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be
Dearest Jesus, unto Thee.

Thou, ah! Thou, hast taken on Thee
Bonds and stripes, a cruel rod;
Pain and scorn were heaped upon Thee,
O Thou sinless Son of God,
Thus didst Thou my soul deliver
from the bonds of sin;
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be
Dearest Jesus, unto Thee.

Thou hast borne the smiting only
That my wounds might all be whole;
Thou hast suffered, sad and lonely,
Rest to give my weary soul;
Yea, the curse of God enduring,
Blessings unto me securing.
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be
Dearest Jesus, unto Thee.

Hymn 200

1 I know that my Redeemer lives;
what comfort this sweet sentence gives!
He lives, He lives, who once was dead;
He lives, my everliving Head.

2 He lives triumphant from the grave,
He lives eternally to save,
He lives all-glorious in the sky,
He lives exalted there on high.

3 He lives to bless me with His love,
He lives to plead for me above,
He lives my hungry soul to feed,
He lives to help in time of need.

4 He lives to grant me rich supply,
He lives to guide me with His eye,
He lives to comfort me when faint,
He live to hear my soul's complaint.

5 He 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.

6 He lives, my kind, wise, heav'nly friend,
He lives and loves me to the end;
He lives, and while He lives, I'll sing;
He lives, my Prophet, Priest, and King.

7 He lives and grants me daily breath;
He lives and I shall conquer death;
He lives my mansion to prepare;
He lives to bring me safely there.

8 He lives, all glory to His name!
He lives, my Jesus, still the same.
Oh, the sweet joy this sentence gives,
"I know that my Redeemer lives!"

Hymn 151 (5-7)

Thou hast suffered men to bruise Thee
That from pain I might be free;
Falsely did Thy foes accuse Thee,
Thence I gain security;
Comfortless Thy soul did languish
Me to comfort in my anguish.
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,
Dearest Jesus, unto Thee.

Thou hast suffered great affliction,
And hast borne it patiently,
Even death by crucifixion,
Fully to atone for me;
Thou didst choose to be tormented
That my doom should be prevented.

Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,
Dearest Jesus, unto Thee.

Then, for all that wrought my pardon,
For Thy sorrows deep and sore,
For Thine anguish in the Garden,
I will thank Thee evermore;
Thank Thee for they groaning, sighing,
For Thy bleeding and Thy dying,
For that last triumphant cry
And shall praise Thee, Lord, on high.

Closing Hymn

1 Father, we praise thee, now the night is over;
active and watchful, stand we all before thee;
singing we offer prayer and meditation:
thus we adore thee.

2 Monarch of all things, fit us for thy mansions;
banish our weakness, health and wholeness
sending;
bring us to heaven, where thy saints united
joy without ending.

3 All-holy Father, Son and equal Spirit,
Trinity blessed, send us thy salvation;
Thine is the glory, gleaming and resounding
through all creation.

Easter Sunday – 2020

Text: Romans 6:1-11

*"Awake my heart with gladness, see what today is done;
Now after gloom and sadness, comes forth the glorious Sun.
My Savior there was laid, where our bed must be made
When to the realms of light our spirit wings its flight.*

*The Foe in triumph shouted, when Christ lay in the tomb
But, lo, he now is routed, his boast is turned to gloom,
For Christ again is free; in glorious victory
He who is strong to save has triumphed o'er the grave!" (TLH 192)*

Dear Christians, *this* is the day that the Lord has made! *We will* rejoice and be glad in it! Amen!

I was reminded several weeks ago of the "How much? This much!" game that I vaguely remember hearing as a child. One of my granddaughters was bemoaning the fact that one of the girls at her school only loves her this much (holding her two little hands about a foot apart – adjusting the distance a bit as she thought about it) but that that same friend loves her older sister **THIS** much (as she stretched her little arms as far apart as she could.) Of course I had to show her that her papa loved both of them even wider.

Interesting way to demonstrate how much you love someone, isn't it? Think of that next time to see your Savior with his arms extended on the cross of Calvary. That's *his* way of telling you: "*I love you this much.*" This morning we celebrate the result of our Savior's love, the empty tomb of Easter morning and the divine declaration that mankind's sin-debt has been paid in full.

Our text for this most hallowed morning is found recorded in the Epistle to the Romans, the Sixth Chapter:

ESV Romans 6:1-11 *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ ¶ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹ So you also - consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

These are the perfect, holy words of our Savior God. Acknowledging the power of these words both to bring the spiritually dead to life and also to sustain each living soul in that saving faith, we trust that our God will provide these same blessings among us this morning. To this end we pray: "**Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth.**" Amen.

It seems that almost nothing on earth is ever really done, never really finished. I'm sure you see evidence of that fact at home and at work pretty much every day. Get out there and wash your windows and you can pretty much bank on a dusty wind or a dirty rain by week's end. Rake your lawn and the leaves will eventually come back; mow it and the grass starts growing back almost immediately. Cook a meal and there are dishes to wash. Finish that and the process starts all over in a couple of hours.

That's partly why Easter is just the best – the greatest of all Church holidays. It is the holiday of completion. Nothing is left, nothing remains to be done. The battle for the eternal souls of all mankind has been fought and – in Christ – you and I won. There is nothing left to do. Satan and his minions lost, forever. Our side shouts for joy on this day because today the outcome is announced by God himself. Our Champion, our Divine Substitute, defeated our soul's great enemies in a most unique way: by allowing himself to be killed.

Who could have imagined such a plan? Jesus allowed his enemies to capture and kill him, and in so doing they themselves sealed their own doom and our eternal victory.

No one really understood God's plan until Jesus had carried it out, did they? Even those who believed in Jesus tried to alter his course, believing that anything was better than death. In death they saw defeat. Yet in this case, Jesus' death gained for every sinner an eternal victory. What is more, this battle, having been won, will never have to be fought again. The empty tomb of Easter is God's declaration of the final outcome, which is *our* victory and *Satan's* defeat. Nothing can ever undo or nullify that perfect result. For all time and eternity Jesus has removed the penalty of sin by paying it himself, in full. God has declared it to be so by raising Jesus from the dead on the third day. You and I therefore celebrate on this day not only because our Lord was raised to life, but because what we owed God on account of our sins has thereby been declared to have been paid in full. Through faith in Jesus Christ, salvation is ours. Thanks be to God who has given us this victory in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

On this morning then we celebrate our victory – which is exactly the beauty and the majesty of Easter Sunday. Jesus did not fail. The tomb was empty. Jesus died on Good Friday a sinless man. Having offered then the perfect sacrifice for sin, God the Father declared his Son's mission a perfect success by raising Jesus from the dead, his mission complete in every way. That's also why Paul, writing by inspiration of the Holy Spirit in our text, said what he did: ***"We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ For the death he died he died to sin, once for all."***

The Resurrection is the key. It is the heart and soul of the Christian faith. Absolutely everything is predicated on – depends utterly on – the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the very event we celebrate this morning. Without it, nothing is the same. Yet by the same token, *with it, nothing is the same either*. Easter Sunday (the Resurrection of our Lord) changes absolutely everything, in this life and in the next. That's exactly why our text says what it does: ***Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.***

What a profound and utterly uplifting truth the Holy Spirit here shares with us. The resurrection of Jesus Christ not only signaled *his* victory, it assures us of our own. You and I were tied to Christ by our baptism. Our text tells us that each of us died there with Christ, at our baptism. What that means is that Satan's hold on us was there broken and we thereby become children of God: ***We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.*** The result, according to our text, was that since we thereby shared in his death, we also now get to share in his resurrection: (Verse 5) ***For if we have been united with him in a death like his, (which our text assured us we were by virtue of our baptism) we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.***

That's the personal stake every single Christian has in the event we celebrate on this day. The empty tomb means that death's grip on *you* has also been broken. Though the earthly body may die – as did Christ's – it cannot stay dead any more than Christ's body could remain in the tomb. This is God's gift to you on Easter Sunday. You are an immortal child of God and heir of eternal life.

You know that, I know that, but the unbelieving world does not. But they will. John spoke of a *hidden* relationship with our God, unseen by the world, and how that hidden relationship will one day be revealed to all creation – when he said in 1 John 3:1-2: ***"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."***

Not only then does the Resurrection change everything, when Jesus returns everything will be changed again. That's also part of the promise of Easter Sunday. This same Apostle Paul also wrote in Colossians 3:4: ***"When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."*** All of this

works together as a demonstration not only of why this day is so special, but why Christianity is so different. Our relationship with our Savior – though hidden from the world – brings about a profound change in God's children. It shifts our focus from the seedy, paltry things of this world and elevates our desires, our goals, our vision, our attitude. Paul set the stage for this change when he referred in our text to the Resurrection. He then went on to describe the natural result of our death and rebirth in Christ: **"So you also - consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."**

Some read that as though Paul just undid everything he had been saying up until this point. Didn't he just tell us that this isn't over after all, and that there is still more that we have to do – Jesus did his part, now we have to do ours? Not even close. Paul isn't trying to guilt us into behavior modification. He isn't trying to shame us into cleaning up our act. He's simply pointing out a fact of life for the child of God: Christ's resurrection from the dead changed everything, including you and me.

Our text talks about **"walking in newness of life."** Don't miss here the fact that Paul is not advocating change; he's reminding us of the change *that has already taken place* in every Christian heart. In *you*. Through faith in Jesus Christ you already have **"newness of life,"** and because you do, your life going forward has already been permanently, irrevocably changed. Paul is not therefore telling us to change; he's reminding us of the change that has already taken place within us.

Each one of you, individually, knows that change. Already within you is the desire to live your life in harmony with God's Word and will. This is undoubtedly a part of what the Holy Spirit was talking about when through the Prophet Jeremiah he said, **"No longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."** (Jeremiah 31:34) So also no one needs to try to coerce you into avoiding sin – according to that new man within you, you already want that – just as no one needs to try to compel you to be filled with joy and comfort at the empty tomb. Again, you already have those things. You are in possession of those gifts through faith in Jesus Christ.

Do we forget from time to time? Of course - which is exactly why God in his Word provides reminders, as he does in our text for this morning.

That's why we do not celebrate Easter as a one day event. We live it, day by day and moment by moment. It is a reminder of who and what we are – new creations, servants of God himself, and heirs of eternal life. At times we lose sight of our high calling and we allow ourselves to be dragged back down into sin, and to a preoccupation with the silly, the shallow, the pointless, the evil things of this world. We do what we don't want to do and fail to do what we want. These are the things that cause us anxiety and stress - these *passing* things. Our hidden, privileged walk with God never does that, never has that effect. In fact our hearts are filled with joy whenever we do, however imperfectly, walk in that newness of life that is now ours.

This then is not just the message of Easter; it is the sum and substance of the entire Christian faith. Our sins had indeed separated us from our God. Before Christ, even now *without* Christ, nothing mattered and nothing could even now matter, for our view of eternity would hold only terror and foreboding. The great Christian joy of this day is hearing God's promise that, because of what Jesus did for us, one day soon we will join him there, in his heaven, and we will exist with him there in the unimaginable perfection and glory of our new home. How we now long for that great day, with now no terror of conscience, and thrill therefore to the promise and assurance of the empty tomb. Amen.