

“Understand the Scripture”

Mary Magdalene comes running from the tomb and reports to Simon Peter – “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him.” Peter and John hustle to the tomb – and all they find are some linen cloths.

What does this mean? It’s obvious the body of Jesus is not there, but where is it? St. John the Evangelist records this important statement for us – “For as yet, they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise from the dead.”

This is the greatest moment in history! The world has changed! And what do Peter and John do? “The disciples went back to their homes.”

Before we go back to our homes – we need to understand the Scriptures – we need to understand the significance of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead --- because it changes our world!

“As yet, they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise from the dead.” Jesus had clearly told His disciples – at least three times – that He would die and be raised to life again. However, that’s not what St. John is referring to – for “the Scriptures” would be the Old Testament. They did not understand the Old Testament Scriptures – which also speak of Christ’s death and resurrection.

Last night, in the Service of Readings, we read a number of the Old Testament Scriptures. What you may not have understood – is that they connect with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – and, they have significant meaning for you.

The Service of Readings began with the Creation account from Genesis. The death and resurrection of Jesus must be understood in light of God’s creation. He is a God of LIFE – and He has created all things for the sake of LIFE.

This is “very good” He says – and so, it’s no surprise – that He would raise His crucified Son to LIFE again. And this He does, for your sake – so that you too may LIVE again.

The next Scripture that we must understand, and connect with Jesus – is the account of the Flood. When we get to this point in Holy Scripture – the world has changed – changed dramatically from the time when man lived in communion with God in the Garden of Eden.

Now the desires of mans heart is only evil all the time. The rebellious sin of Adam has inundated the whole world. Death now covers God’s “very good” creation. But God does not abandon us to the grave – for He is the God of LIFE.

By the power of His Word He destroys rebellious man – and by the power of His promise He preserves LIFE. In the water of the Flood, His Word both drowns and delivers. For believing Noah and His family – the Word grants refuge in the ark – the Word saves from death – the Word sustains LIFE – and God’s children step out of the ark into a new creation.

You have been drowned and resurrected to new life in the waters of Holy Baptism. God, by His Word, destroying your Old Adam with all his sinful desires – and resurrecting the New Man who lives by faith – who LIVES because he has been united to Christ in His death and resurrection.

When the Lord tested Abraham, telling him to take his beloved son Isaac and sacrifice him – the Lord knew what this was leading to – the day when He would sacrifice His beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

Faced with death, what’s the Father to do? Well, nothing has changed from Genesis 1 – He is still the God of LIFE – He still desires LIFE for all people. And father Abraham believes that.

God the Father had promised that the Savior of the world would be born from the descendants of Isaac – and father Abraham believed that. He trusts that – even though he sacrifices Isaac – God the Father will raise him to life again. He has to. He’s promised.

Faced with death, the Lord provides – He provides a ram to be sacrificed in place of Isaac. Faced with death, the Lord provides for YOU – providing His own Son Jesus Christ to be sacrificed in your place. His blood is shed, His life given up – so that you may live eternally.

Spared from death, what is one to do? Well, Israel of old is an example for us. The Lord delivered them from slavery in Egypt – He brought them out with the strength of His arm – but when they came to the Red Sea and appeared to be trapped, with Pharaoh’s armies hot on their heels ----- what did they do?

Like we do so often, they grumbled, they accused the God of LIFE of being against them and trying to kill them. These descendants of Abraham did not live by faith – they didn’t trust that the Lord would provide for them in their crisis at the Red Sea.

The God of LIFE – who through the waters of the Red Sea drowned the enemies and gave life to His children – is the Lord who provides for you in your time of need. Don’t be afraid – don’t look at Pharaoh’s armies – don’t look at whatever threatens you – look at Jesus Christ, raised to life again on the third day.

This is the God who saves you through the waters of Holy Baptism. This is the God who promises to be with you always. This is the God who delivers you from your enemies, and gives you LIFE.

The prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel directed us to the life-giving Word of God – a Word that directs us in faith to Jesus Christ. Isaiah writes: “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my Word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” (55:10-11).

And for what purpose does God send forth His Word? Ezekiel tells us. The Lord sends forth His Word to gather us, to sprinkle clean water on us – to cleanse us from our sin, putting away our idols – and giving us a “new heart and a new spirit.”

The Lord – your Creator, Redeemer, Provider – by His almighty Word, kills and makes alive in the waters of Holy Baptism – uniting you to the Savior, Jesus Christ. Through His Word, He gives you the Holy Spirit – so that you may understand the Scriptures, and believe that Jesus’ death and resurrection is your death and resurrection.

With a new heart and a new spirit – by the power of the Holy Spirit given in Holy Baptism – may we understand, and declare with Easter joy – “Alleluia! Christ is risen!”
[He is risen indeed! Alleluia!]

And “what does this mean?” It means that YOU are risen indeed. Alleluia!

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.