

## ***“We Preach Christ Resurrected!”***

I don't know if you realize this, but having this corpus of Jesus on the cross raises the eyebrows of some Christians. They prefer to have their crosses bare – because, as they say – Christ is no longer on the cross, He has been raised from the dead. And that's true. So why do we (and Lutherans, historically) have the body of Jesus on the cross?

Well, because the death of Jesus on the cross is THE sacrifice that atones for the sin of the whole world. That's where forgiveness is earned for all people – or, as Jesus Himself says – “It is finished.” Redemption won. Salvation secured.

When asked about our crosses, many Lutherans will simply go to St. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 1:23 where he says – “we preach Christ crucified.” But did you hear what St. Paul writes in our text for today (also from 1 Corinthians)? In essence he is saying, “we preach Christ resurrected” – and therefore, so should we.

It's not an either/or – it's a both/and. We preach Christ crucified – and – we preach Christ resurrected. I already gave you the short answer for why we preach Christ crucified – but why should we also preach that He has been raised from the dead?

The short and simple answer is because it's true. Jesus Christ, who was crucified, died and was buried – was resurrected to life again on the third day – and even now, He “lives and reigns” to all eternity. But Paul has more to say.

He begins with the false teaching of the day – that there is (in general) no resurrection from the dead. Speaking to his fellow believers, he points out the significance of that false teaching.

If there is no resurrection of the dead – then even Christ has not been raised from death to life – and that means that “our preaching is in vain and your faith is vain.” He goes on to say that we are guilty of misrepresenting God – that “your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” – those who have already died have perished – and we, of all people, are to be pitied.

Just from that you see why the resurrection of Jesus Christ is so important. “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”

“If in this life ONLY we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.” The Apostle is not only pointing out the hope we have for the life everlasting – but that the resurrection of Christ gives us hope for this life!

If there is no resurrection of the dead and Christ has not been raised – then there is no hope for eternity – and that changes the way we live now. If this is it – if you only go around once in life – then you have to grab for all the gusto you can get!

Or, if you prefer a biblical saying over an old slogan from a beer commercial – a denial of the resurrection leads man to conclude that there is “nothing better under the sun but to eat and drink and be merry” (Eccl. 8:15).

But rather than a life of joy and merriment – in that life, man is doomed to despair – because, as St. Paul says, “you are still in your sin.” Your sin is still YOUR SIN. It hangs around your neck as a weight – burdening your every step – filling your days with guilt and shame ... and hopelessness.

Jeremiah describes that cursed life this way. “He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.”

But folks, “Christ is risen, He is risen indeed!” The resurrection of Jesus is for you an Epiphany – showing forth that your sin has been atoned for. Death only comes because of sin – and Jesus dies because He has taken all of your sin, and the sin of all people to Himself – and the wages of our sin brings death to Him.

But His resurrection shows that “it is finished” – your sin is atoned for – and when sin is taken away, so is death – and in its place, there is life! What does this mean? It means (as Jeremiah says) – you are “blessed.”

“He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.”

Your life is not in vain – empty, parched, full of hopelessness – it is watered and nourished by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. When the guilt and shame of your sin parches you – the forgiveness which Christ’s crucifixion earns – gives you relief.

No longer do you fear the death that comes to all people – for your sin is atoned for and your death is defeated. That’s the fruit that your Baptism into Christ’s death and resurrection bears – it gives you relief, it gives you hope – for this life, and for the life to come which has no end.

Folks, it changes your life. It sets you free to live by faith in God and love for your neighbor – to realize and receive the “good” gifts that God has given you (your life, your body and soul, your family, and all the opportunities to love your fellow man). And it sets you free with the hope of the life to come – so that you don’t live this life as if that’s all you have – but there is more “good” to come.

In this life you still sin – and yet – in Christ you are forgiven. In this life your body will fail, you will gather for funerals and at the graves of loved ones, and one day your body will die – and yet – in Christ, your death is defeated, your body will be raised to life, and that life is like Christ’s, it is a life everlasting.

That’s why the Apostle Paul says that Christ’s resurrection is “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” His death and resurrection are the firstfruits – there are more deaths and resurrections to come.

That’s why we as Lutherans confess: “On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true.” Dearly beloved – “Christ is risen, He is risen indeed” – and so are you. Amen.

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