

Shepherd of the Springs Lutheran Church

Festival of Easter

Text: Job 19: 25, I Cor. 5: 7b, John 20: 18

Theme:

For I know that my redeemer lives, and at last He will stand upon the earth. (Job 19: 25)

For Christ our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed. (I Cor. 5: 7b)

Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord." (John 20: 18)

I have seen the Lord. These simple words of Mary Magdalene, repeated by over 500 additional witnesses from the course of the next 40 days turned the ancient world upside down. . . . There were three questions about human existence that the ancient world pondered and discussed in the context of many forums and conversations. They thought them extremely important to understand themselves and all human endeavors they might engage. *What is life? What is death?* And in the face of death, *how can our future be secured?* The ancient Greek and Roman divines and philosophers waxed eloquent on the first two questions with much wisdom and insight. And we might add, their contributions are still worthy of our attentive learning as we would ponder them today. What had them completely stumped however, was the third question: *In the face of death, how can our future be secured?* They had no satisfactory answer to this question. The consensus thought of the day was that death consigned one to an eternal shadowy existence of the human soul in what was called Hades. Here souls wander about in aimless melancholy without any kind of meaning or personal fulfillment.

It was the proclamation to the world first announced by the Angel concerning Jesus of Nazareth: *He is not here, he is risen*, that first brought forth to the ancient gentile world a positive answer to the third question. It was the resurrection of Jesus that brought Good News to the great conversation of the ancient world and it caused faith in the Gospel to ring around the Mediterranean world in a few short decades. And making that answer to the third question more explicit over against the common thinking of the day, Peter exclaimed on Pentecost: *He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption, this Jesus God raised up and of these things we are witnesses.* (Acts 2: 31-32) The death problem that has hung over human existence has been solved by the overwhelming multi-sensual eye-witness reports concerning the meaning of the empty tomb of Jesus.

Last Good Friday night we proclaimed that Jesus was finished dealing with our problem of sin by commending his spirit to His Heavenly Father. He then died and his

lifeless body was buried in a borrowed tomb. The work of our redemption that the Father had given to His incarnate Son was finished and his body was laid to rest. He died to sin for sure - it was then time to rest. The wages of sin is death and the Good News is that Jesus paid them. The question is however: does Paul's explanation of Christian baptism hold water: have we the baptized been crucified and buried with Him such that we may reckon ourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus? The question is not do we get to die to sin with Jesus and rest in a tomb because of it. The question is: *Do we get to come out? . . . Do we get to come out?* The ancient Greeks said *No!* The dead stay dead. And they had a lot of occupied graves to support their position. But if the dead stay dead, how can the future be secured . . . even for those baptized into the death of Christ?

There was an American religious leader of about 100 years ago who was a household name at the time across the country. He sought to enter the great conversation concerning the fundamental questions of human existence by challenging a here-to-for rather settled conviction concerning the second question: *what is death?* While not questioning the matter of taxes, he sought to challenge the certainty of death. We understand that in our baptism we die with the crucified Christ and our Old Self and our sins are buried into death with Him. But this religious leader - he called himself Father Divine - claimed that faith in him as a redeemer would eliminate death altogether. If you would put your faith in Father Divine, so he claimed, you would never see death. The most attractive promise and a charismatic persona gained him a large and growing following for a while. In time however, his movement began to suffer some serious setbacks. Some of his followers began to die. And then there was an event that proved fatal to the movement and since then, his name has been moving toward total obscurity. Father Divine died. . . . Will the real redeemer please rise!

Since evil is still in the world and it is both with us and within us . . . and since the wages of sin is death; the death problem remains and therefore in the face of it, the important question for us is still, *how can our future be secured.* The question is not about the reality of death but will death have the final say? Can we have a confident hope in the midst of its impending darkness? What good thing can come out of a date with death? On Friday last, we linked the events of Christ the crucified to your baptism. And in your baptism, you don't just get to survey the wondrous cross of Christ...you get to bear it and live in it. But the question about our baptism is this: when we die to sin with Jesus . . . do we just stay dead? If we have been buried with Jesus in his tomb . . . do we get to come out? We can only really rest there if one day . . . we get to come out.

The apostles and all who heard their testimony about the empty tomb of Jesus realized that if the crucified Jesus could bodily come out of his tomb; well then, so can we. The incredible message, *He is not here, He is risen* coupled with all of his appearances that began with Mary provide a sure foundation for a certain hope that as

we have died with Jesus to sin, we also will be raised from the dead unto newness of life. Death provided only a temporary resting for Jesus and the same shall be the case for us as well. Death has been not banished as yet, but it has already been overcome in the resurrection of Jesus. We may have confidence about this because what was vision for Job, we have *seen* that our Redeemer lives. Our Passover Lamb who was slain has defeated the powers of death and raised from the dead no longer to die. For that reason, we may rest from our labors, but we shall take them up again in the Better Day that is coming when we too shall rise and death shall be no more.

We are indeed baptized sons and daughters of God...but often, like the crucified Jesus, we're not much to look at...no glory to behold here. We are righteous, but you can't see our halos. Yes, we wear robes of righteousness - the King's clothes - but we wear them *so transparently!* Our poverty and sinful nakedness puts our faith to the test and we can have our doubts at times can't we? Are we really dying to sin or are we just dying because of it? We have seen the cross . . . where is the glory? For all of us who long for a glimpse of the *glory story* - the story that answers the third question of human existence - that death has been overcome and the future secured, that we too get to come out of Christ's tomb - Easter provides it with a glimpse of the empty tomb and the parade of witnesses and appearances of the risen Christ. Its all over but the shouting . . . so let's do some . . . ***Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed, Hallelujah!***

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. A-men.