



WHAT IF JESUS HAD NOT RISEN?

Grace Lutheran Church/Caminando con Jesús

The Holy Triduum: *Easter Sunday*

April 5, 2015

Pastor David J Salinas

SERMON TEXT

1 Corinthians 15:19,20

✝ IN NOMINE JESU ✝

Pastor: Christ is risen!

Congregation: He is risen indeed!

That greeting known as the Paschal Greeting or Easter Acclamation is the way Christians have greeted each other almost from when Jesus first rose. There's a reason for that. That greeting is filled with and imparts to the people who speak it the deepest and longest lasting peace there is—the peace of the risen Christ. That greeting gives the people who speak it unshakeable certainty, undying hope, and unconquerable joy. Just think: in a sweet, almost melodic way that greeting promises and assures us that Jesus is Savior. A risen Jesus means the devil's head is crushed and our sins and guilt is all forgiven! That greeting promises and assures us that Jesus is God who rules all things for us, for our benefit. Who but God could shake off death? Why did God suffer and die, if not for us, if not to rule all things for us and for our salvation? That greeting assures us that you and I will also rise. If Jesus, the Head of the body, rose, how can the body not be far behind!

But like so many truths of Scripture, that Easter greeting with all the significance, blessing, and power it contains for our souls and lives can so easily roll off our tongues without us thinking about it. The festival of Easter that is seven weeks long can degenerate into a one day affair where we dress up a little more than usual for church, enjoy hunting and eating chocolate Easter eggs, have a ham dinner with family, and God forbid, make Easter Sunday nothing more than one of two times a year we

make it to church. What I mean is this: as with Christmas, if we're not careful, we followers of the crucified, buried, and risen Lord Jesus can miss out on the true meaning of Easter contained in that greeting to our detriment and impoverishment. And so, beginning today, Easter Sunday, and all throughout the seven weeks of Easter we are going to explore, mine, and examine the magnificent jewel that is Easter, that is the truth—Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed!—and what it means for us to our great encouragement, strength, and soul's salvation. We're going to do that, actually, by first considering and contemplating the indescribably horrible alternative—*What if?* What if Jesus did not really rise on the third day like he said he would and like the Bible reports and testifies that he did? I ask you today, my dear people, dear friends: ***What if Christ had not risen?***

So, what if? What if Christ had not truly, bodily risen from the dead? What if what we just read in the Gospel moments ago was simply a myth, a fairy tale, a symbol or metaphor for second chances and a new beginning in life? What then for you and me?

Well, what does Paul tell us under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit? If Jesus did not rise, Paul says that we, Christians, are even more pitiful than unbelievers! Look again:

"If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people ('all' includes unbelievers) most to be pitied."

If Christ had not risen we would be the most pitiful people on the face of the earth! Why is that? Because of what Paul says two verses earlier. He says: "If Christ is not risen, 'you're faith is futile (it's no good); you are still in your sins' (1 Co 15:17b)! If Jesus did not rise, if his body saw decay and turned to dust in Joseph of Arimathea's grave, then our faith in him doesn't amount to a hill of beans, because that would be God's way of saying, "Sorry, folks. We tried, but not even my Son's sacrifice on

Calvary was enough to satisfy my justice and pay off the debt of your sin." And so, if Christ is not risen, we are not forgiven; we have no righteousness that is truly credited to our account by trusting in Jesus. And that means, if Jesus is not risen, then you and I are in the same spiritual boat as the unbelievers. Just like them, at death we either stop existing, we just go into an eternal fade to black, or, infinitely worse, we all go to hell. But that means for this life we're worse off than they are, because, it's precisely for our faith in a risen Savior that we deny our right to come in first place to serve others; it's for our faith in a risen Savior that we deny the sinful lusts that bring us pleasure, and, therefore, deny ourselves the chance at the only enjoyments we were meant to have, if this life really is all there is; it's for our faith in Jesus that we endure ridicule for, among other things, believing that Jesus is risen. What absolutely, positively pitiful people you and I would be, then, if Christ is not risen!

We all know this by experience, don't we? We know what it is like to live out that horrible 'What if,' to live as if Jesus had not risen, and, live pitifully, as a result! Just think about all the time we spend wallowing in our past, hating ourselves for our past sins, failures, and mistakes, beating ourselves up for the things that didn't turn out as we planned, or that went terribly wrong for a loved one—"Darn it! Why didn't I do this? Oh, I should have said that to her?" Just think about the times that like a person who has gripped an electric fence and their muscles have clenched onto the wire by the electric pulse, we can't let go of the anger in our hearts we feel at the way someone has hurt us or mistreated us; and, most often, we want to let it go, because we hate feeling that way and we know hate is not good for us body or soul, but, sometimes, we don't want to let go; we feed off that anger. What is all that but the pitiful life of living as if Christ had not risen, and, therefore, there is no forgiveness. Or think about the instances when we live afraid—afraid of the huge,

seemingly immovable obstacles in our lives, like say, oh, a large stone in front of a grave—money problems, health problems, family problems. We live afraid of the possible boulders barreling down on us in the future, and we worry, “How am I going to handle that? How is this going to turn out?” What is that but the pitiful life of someone who does not believe he or she has a risen and living Savior overcoming obstacles and ruling over all things for him or her. Or think about the times we live for ourselves not for him who died for us and rose again. Think about the times we get caught up in the joys and concerns of this life, and let them take priority over Christ and his word, until they press so hard, we have nowhere else to turn but to Christ and his word. Think about the fights we have with loved ones because of each person’s incessant drive to get their way. What is that but living the pitiful life of self-centeredness and self-absorption because we don’t have a risen and living Lord on which to focus and on whose beauty to gaze upon all our days.

And so, I am just so grateful today to the Lord Jesus and I know you are to, for his keeping that most wonderful unfailing promise of his—I must go to Jerusalem, suffer at the hands of the wicked, be crucified, *and on the third day be raised to life!* My heart is filled with a great big joyous “Alleluia!” and I know yours is too, for the Lord’s accomplishing and revealing to us that most precious of all truths and realities, that most attested fact of ancient history that is not an “if” but an “indeed”—CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN! INDEED! INDEED! INDEED! I pray that like foam of a root-beer bubbling over the lip of the cup, the joy and excitement of Easter bubbles over the edges of our hearts, because we know that that horrible what-if—*What if Christ had not risen?*—is not the case, Christ is risen, and we know better than ever what that certain, undeniable, rock-solid historical fact means for each one of us: It means we are not now and never will be pitiful people! No, no, no! Not us! Not ever! Not ever!

Since Christ is risen indeed, then you and I are not guilty, absolutely forgiven and spotless of every sin *indeed!* Do the math: Since sin is the cause of death, wherever sin is present, death is present and vice-versa. Well, obviously, Jesus rising from the dead means that there is no more sin on him that is present, otherwise he'd still be dead. Since Jesus carried on him the sin of the world on Calvary, and paid for it with his suffering and death, that means that when Jesus rose on Easter Sunday the world woke up acquitted, forgiven! And since you are part of the world that means you are 100% acquitted of every sin, failure, short-coming, and weakness of faith!

Since Christ is risen indeed, there is a heaven indeed and you are going to it indeed, because the trust in Jesus that the Holy Spirit gave you first at Baptism and that he sustains and grows through the news of Christ-crucified and risen for you in his word and the Lord's Supper is good indeed! The righteousness Jesus won for you by his perfect life and innocent death and suffering in your place and that he proclaimed in his resurrection truly covers you indeed, so that you are fit for heaven, the home of the holy and innocent indeed!

Since Christ is risen indeed, our present is secure and our future on earth is bright and blessed, regardless of the earthly circumstances! Yes, indeed, because since Christ is risen indeed then he truly is God in the flesh indeed. As we said at the beginning of the sermon, who but God could get up from death like we do from a nap? That means we have a living Lord who can and will keep all of his promises to us, even as he loved us enough and was powerful enough to keep the amazing promises of his death and resurrection for us. Since one of his promises is to rule all things for us, then you and I have a God who today and tomorrow lives just as you sang in the hymn: "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."

Since Christ is risen indeed, you and I have been truly raised to new life by the power of that great good news indeed, and this new life truly is the most meaningful and fulfilling indeed! You and I have the power to say No to self and sin, and Yes to Christ and serving him! And living in such a way, in imitation of Christ, is the noblest life, because what could be a greater model to imitate and pattern your life after than the Son of God? And living in such a way, truly benefits and blesses the people around you and pleases your living Savior.

Since Christ is risen indeed, the grave cannot, I repeat, *cannot* keep you, indeed! Paul assures us of that when he reminds us that Jesus who rose from the dead on Easter is "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." If he is the *first* fruit on the tree of the Church, of which he is Head, to have bloomed to new life, you and I are the *next* fruit. Since the Head bloomed to new life, you and I, his body will, yes, must bloom to new life from the grave with bodies that will be as glorious and as eternally alive as our living Savior's!

Well, since there are no "ifs," "ands," or "buts," about it, Christ is risen indeed, I have just one more thing to say to your heart and mine: shout the Paschal Greeting, the Easter Acclamation with all the gusto the Holy Spirit gives you, and live out that Easter greeting everyday of your lives. Live in the peace of forgiveness, resting your weary souls in the pierced but living hands of our Savior! Let go of all anger and bitterness at others, trusting in your Lord's perfect love for you and justice for all! Live daily with the renewed confidence and sure hope that all things will work out for our absolute and eternal good, because our Lord Jesus lives to make that a reality, according to his gracious promise! Live each day not for yourselves but for him

who died for you and lives again, loving each other and all others, *as he loved us!* Live each day appreciating everything God gives while joyfully anticipating heaven!

Yes, live like that, and let me hear it one more time:

Pastor: CHRIST IS RISEN!

Congregation: HE IS RISEN INDEED!

Amen. Alleluia!

SOLI DEO GLORIA

