

The Resurrection of Our Lord (Easter Day)

April 17, 2022

Sermon Text: Romans 4:25<sup>i</sup>

Other Texts<sup>ii</sup>: Isaiah 65:17-25 (Old Testament); 1 Corinthians 15:19-26 (Epistle); Luke 24:1-12 (Gospel Reading)

### **“Jesus’ Resurrection and Its Declaration Concerning Us”**

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father be yours through faith in the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

If you ask a Christian, “What did Jesus do for you?” most will say, “He died to pay for my sins.” And that’s a very good answer! We just observed Good Friday, the day on which our dear Savior died. Truly, it is neither coincidence nor accident that the cross became a symbol of Christianity. Our Lord’s death is a central feature of the Christian faith, an absolute necessity to declare in our preaching and teaching, as St. Paul writes, “We preach Christ crucified.”<sup>iii</sup>

It is necessary to proclaim because the death of Christ Jesus is fundamental to our salvation. In Adam, the first man and so the head of humanity, all people sinned as he cast us down in his rebellion, a rebellion we also continue by our own sins, being corrupted by the sinful nature that we have inherited from him. So we all stand as sinners before the holy God with nothing we can do since God is the One we have sinned against. He must forgive us our sins.

But it is written in the book of Hebrews, “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins,”<sup>iv</sup> a truth shown by the repeated sacrifices required under the old covenant. So yes, Christ Jesus died to pay for our sins, His blood cleansing us from all our unrighteousness so that we would be white as snow.<sup>v</sup> Such must be proclaimed to the ends of the world and to the end of time. But more must be said and so we consider our sermon text from Paul’s letter to the Romans, “[Christ] was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.”<sup>vi</sup>

Delivered up for our trespasses, that is delivered up to death by being lifted up on the cross. But Jesus did not remain dead. Quite the opposite, on the third day He rose again from the dead as we confess in our Christian creeds. And while His disciples were slow to believe, Jesus had previously declared not only His imminent death, but also His equally imminent resurrection. So also, this was revealed in the Old Testament. For example, two texts regularly read on Good Friday that declare the Messiah’s death, which give such details of the future event that prove them to be divinely inspired, are Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53. Yet, while proclaiming His death, both conclude declaring that the One who died for others would live, enjoying His victory.

But *why* is the resurrection important? Consider how we confess that Jesus “was delivered up for our trespasses,” that is, Jesus died to pay for our sins. *But what if He remained dead?* We would be left wondering if He actually made the payment or not, wouldn’t we? Was it enough, or is there more yet to be paid? Which would of course mean, *be paid by us*. So how much must we still pay? How would we ever know when or even if we had paid it? Would we have to wait until Judgment Day to find out? And so our death becomes rather terrifying indeed!

But in reality those questions of doubt I just mentioned are *far too confident*. Why? Because they assume that Jesus' death at least did *something*. But that's both a pretty huge assumption, and a pretty wrong one as well. Again why? Because as I said, both the prophets of old and Christ Himself said that He would *rise again*. If Jesus didn't rise, it would mean that He could either be deluded or a complete liar, but He absolutely could not be the Christ, the Son of God.<sup>vii</sup> St. Paul was clear on this issue, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied."<sup>viii</sup>

But Christ is risen! The prophets and Christ Jesus Himself foretold it, and the apostles, seeing Him, proclaimed it though it brought them suffering and death (a fine proof, by the way, of the truthfulness of their message that only close-minded skeptics doubt). And Jesus' resurrection proves that He is the Christ, the Son of God, who has power even over death.<sup>ix</sup> It proves that all that He preached was true, including that His death earned the forgiveness of our sins. That's why St. Paul joyfully writes, "[Christ] was...raised for our justification."

There are a lot of terms in the Bible, and they're all important because they're part of God's Word. But of all the terms in the Bible, justification may very well be the most important, the most crucial, for us to understand. It is actually a courtroom term which pictures a judge rendering a verdict of *not guilty*. So to justify is to declare someone not guilty.

Actually, justification is a term that is familiar to us, if not by the word itself, at least as a concept. For people are always attempting to justify their actions. In such cases it goes something like this, "I understand that, at first glance, it looks like I did something wrong. And under normal circumstances, it may have been. But in my *specific* situation and with my *good* intentions, what I did (am doing!) is perfectly *justified*, I am actually in the right."

And so people spend a lot of time and energy attempting to justify themselves. Yet, have you ever noticed that those who are justifying themselves spend a lot of time doing so to others? That's because they aren't primarily interested in hearing "You're not guilty" from *themselves*. What they really want is to hear it from *others*. And we are not exceptions, are we?

Sometimes it is a particular other whose judgment matters to us, whose "not guilty" we crave. Maybe that person is one of our parents, or one (or all!) of our children. Maybe it's our spouse. Maybe it's an actual judge. Whatever the case, despite our protestations and blustering to the contrary, deep down we know that our justifying of ourselves does not really count, it cannot free us from the guilt in our conscience. This explains why those who are in sin do not ask for tolerance, but demand agreement, that is, justification of their sin, and won't accept anything less. Because anything less leaves them still feeling the gnawing pain of the very guilt that they so vehemently denying even exists, for which they blame others.

But consider, not just any person's "not guilty" actually counts. For example, if you're on trial for a capital crime, you may plead your case to your friends, and they may be a very sympathetic audience—maybe even sympathetic to the point of ignoring facts. You may plead your case to your attorneys, and they may say that they believe you to be innocent. As you testify concerning your innocence and why what you did was justifiable, you may have every single person in the

audience nodding along with you. But none of that ultimately matters since it is only the “not guilty” of those who are entrusted with making the judgment that actually counts.

In an earthly court room, that is either the judge or the jury. Their verdict means the difference between freedom or imprisonment, perhaps even life or death. But as important as such a verdict is for this life, there is another court that is even more critical because its verdict deals not only with life or death, but it deals with such on the eternal scale.

That is why the one we need to justify us—to declare us not guilty—is *God*, because you and I have committed crimes *against Him*. With David we confess, “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.”<sup>x</sup> And make no mistake, there is really no such thing as a minor crime against God. Every sin we commit is a capital offense, making us worthy of the eternal death penalty. Degrees of torment in hell will deal with the differences of sins, but there is no part of hell that isn’t hell. The wages of sin is death, eternal death.<sup>xi</sup> That is what God says.

Consequently, what others say doesn’t really matter. They can agree with you that the kind of sins you’ve committed aren’t really deserving of the eternal death penalty from God. You might even be able to convince them that what you’ve done, or are currently doing, isn’t wrong. They may nod in agreement and declare you not guilty so often that you start believing it yourself as you ignore your conscience. But what they say doesn’t really matter. What matters is what *God* says about them. And His Word says that many of our actions, our words, and even our thoughts are sin, that sin still contaminates our best of works, and so we are guilty before Him and deserve the death penalty. And no amount of self-justification or the justification of others will compel God to say to you, “Not guilty.” All such will be shown as pathetic excuses.

But then there is Jesus. Though He was sinless, living the perfect life under the Law, He was sentenced to death. *But this travesty of earthly justice was God’s plan of salvation from eternity.* His punishing sins in His Son so that He is just, even so He could then declare sinners like you and me justified, not guilty.<sup>xii</sup> *That* is the declaration that Jesus’ resurrection has made!

Jesus is risen! This means that His Father accepted His life and death as the sacrifice for our sins. Because He is true man, He can be the substitute for Adam’s children. Because He is true God, all of Adam’s children are included in His substitution. And so when Jesus rose, it was not only God’s declaration that He was not guilty of any sins, but it also is the declaration that we are not guilty as well, the proof that Jesus’ triumphant cry, “It is finished!” is absolutely true!

So understand what God was really saying through that empty tomb, whom He was really justifying. While the passage in Romans chapter 4 states quite clearly that God raised Jesus to life, it was not so much for Jesus, but for us! “He...was raised for *our* justification.” Our. Me. You. *We* were declared not guilty at that empty tomb. When God raised Jesus back to life, He also declared us to be innocent, worthy of eternal life in Christ.

Easter isn’t only about Jesus, but it’s about you as well. It’s about you being freed from God’s condemnation of your sins. It’s about you no longer needing to justify your sins, which doesn’t work anyway, but instead leads you to repent of them and trust in Jesus knowing you are fully forgiven through faith in Him. It’s about you not needing to fear death, because the risen Lord

defeated death and gives to you His victory, the promise of the resurrection of your body unto life everlasting in the glorious world to come. Yes, Easter is about the verdict of the only One whose judgment matters, and His judgment is not guilty, because He raised Jesus from the dead *for your justification*. So a truly blessed and happy Easter to you all! Christ is risen! Amen!

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<sup>i</sup> Free text.

<sup>ii</sup> These are the appointed texts for this Festival Sunday.

<sup>iii</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:23. All quotes are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

<sup>iv</sup> Hebrews 9:22.

<sup>v</sup> 1 John 1:7, 9; Isaiah 1:18. Cf. Revelation 7:9, 14.

<sup>vi</sup> Romans 4:25.

<sup>vii</sup> Cf. John 20:31.

<sup>viii</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:17-19.

<sup>ix</sup> E.g. Romans 1:4.

<sup>x</sup> Psalm 51:4a.

<sup>xi</sup> Romans 6:23a.

<sup>xii</sup> Romans 3:26.