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The Resurrection of Our Lord
April 12, 2020
Immanuel Lutheran, Michigan City
Exodus 14:10 – 15:1
John 20:1-18

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

Excuse me if I feel like I need to compensate for the lack of enthusiasm in the room. Now I want you all in your homes to response loudly enough that I can hear you through your computer screens and phones!

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

I have to admit, Easter without gathering with you all doesn't feel a lot like Easter. It almost feels like we're still in Lent. We're rejoicing, but a part of us is still mourning. You've probably been there at other times in your lives. After all, church holy days do not promise to give absolutely no troubles in life. You can still lose a loved one and be heartsick with their absence; you can have a heated argument with your family (actually It's even more likely to happen on holidays!); you can suffer financial stress; you can be sick; cancer patients still have cancer. Last year my family didn't attend Easter service because of the flu and strep throat. Needless to say, it wasn't the happiest Easter for us. This now makes two years that my wife and kids haven't come to Easter services. But we also remember that we have elderly and sick who can never come to services when we have them. Easter doesn't just magically make all things well.

Think about our reading from Exodus today. It's not like the Israelites went from slavery to never having anything evil happening to them again. They were backed up against the sea with the Egyptians pursuing them. And when they were rescued there, they entered the wilderness where there was no food or water. And when they were rescued from that they reached the promised land which was inhabited with large and strong people in well-fortified cities. And once they conquered them and settled down, they had the surrounding enemies to contend with. God's saving acts did not give them life without any problems.

Why? Because we still live in a world which has been corrupted by human sin and is utterly turned against God; because we still have original sin which contends against the Spirit; because the devil is still prowling around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. Thus, we still have trials.

But doesn't God have power over them? Of course He does! Then why doesn't God just destroy everything that is evil and thus get rid of all suffering? Because then He'd have to destroy you. You and I are not free from sin. As St. Paul writes in Romans 7:18, "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh." We are full of doubts and impure thoughts and deeds. We deserve judgment with the rest of the world.

Instead, by God's merciful favor and patience, He has let us remain alive – and others – so that everyone would hear the Good News of Jesus Christ and believe and have forgiveness, life, and salvation. Just look how long God put up with the Israelites while they moaned and groaned in

the wilderness and even how God endured their idol worship and outright rebellion in order to save them! Yes, many died in the wilderness for their sins, but God would've been in the right to just destroy them all and start over. But God is merciful. And not only was God merciful to the Israelites in doing so, but to all the nations who would come to know Him through them, and, even more, to all future generations who would have salvation from the Jews, that is, from Jesus Christ.

In what way can I have salvation, if I still have to endure evil? How is that salvation at all? Consider the Exodus. Look at what God did for them. When they were terrified and lost their trust in God, Moses said, "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will work for you today." And God stood as a pillar of fire between them and the Egyptians; He led Israel across the sea on dry land; then He easily baited the Egyptians into the Sea and they were no more. God led the Israelites' fickle hearts to put their trust in Him again so that they would receive His blessings. He destroyed their doubts and fears; he crushed entirely their trust in Egyptian gods or human strength and power; and He gave them the joy of His salvation. He did not let their sinful hearts, the Egyptians, or the devil, who was certainly tempting them to lose all faith, have the victory. They did not have the last word or prevail against Israel. God won.

That is the salvation of which we can be absolutely sure. "God works all things for the good of those who love Him," Romans 8. Coronavirus doesn't win. Cancer doesn't win. The world doesn't win. Your Old Adam doesn't win. Death doesn't win. God wins. And if God wins, you win, since God is doing all of this for your good.

How does God win? That's what Easter is all about! God baited the devil, much like he baited the Egyptians, by sending His own Son and making Him in the weakness of human flesh. The devil could not resist, but pursued Him all the way to the cross, burning with all of hell's wrath. And Christ, who had taken everything evil in the world into Himself, all human sin, died on the cross and extinguished the fire of hell and death for humanity. Then He descended into hell to claim His power over the devil and to chain him up. He rose triumphantly from the grave and rules over God's kingdom with all His saving power. Nothing now in heaven or on earth can separate God's chosen people from their God.

Our triumphant, risen Jesus Christ, continually baits the devil and then triumphs over him again. God sends trials in which the devil thinks he can use to master you, but then God shares with you His victory and hell is defeated again. And you end up stronger in God's Spirit than you began. As it says in Romans 5:3-5, "We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

Think of it this way. Sometimes parents can give their children a hard time because they are making a big deal about something that is pretty small in the scheme of things. Like a young child throwing a fit because you sliced her apple instead of giving it to her whole. Or for older children, teenagers have all kinds of drama in their relationships at school. Now, I realize that there are some brain development issues at play here, but also, adults have had many more and

bigger problems that they've gone through. So, we have a hard time understanding or sympathizing with small problems. We know they'll get over it or through it and come out alright. But they don't know that. They haven't been there. Likewise, God builds our endurance and character through trials so that no matter what the devil or the world throw at us, we still hope in our God and have His salvation. And, even more, God uses our trials so that we can help others and share our hope with them.

Good parenting understands that children's small problems are very big in their eyes. We hold them and comfort them and say that it's going to be alright. And we help them to find solutions to their problems. God is a good Father and disciplines us for a time, but also comforts us and pulls us through, so that by the end, not even death can overwhelm us.

In God's eyes things like coronavirus, cancer, sin, death and even the devil are small things. His Son has already suffered for them and conquered them and He is risen. But in our eyes, they are scary. But God's Son suffered all of our cursed world and the temptations of the devil so that He can sympathize with us in our trials and deliver us from them. God says to you, "That little sickness or sin or temptation is nothing my Son cannot handle. He died for you and is risen. Everyone who believes and is baptized as a wall of water on their right and on their left to protect them from harm, and they have My Son as a pillar of fire to stand between them and all evil. Fear not. Listen to my Word which causes the devil to flee. Here, I will comfort you with the words of Absolution, 'Your sins are forgiven.' Sin cannot not master you. And even more take and eat my Son's body, given for you. And here, drink my Son's blood which was shed for

you for the forgiveness of sins. Let His holy Supper calm your fears and give you the saving power of my Son's resurrection, so that sickness and death will not stand a chance against you."

On that first Easter Day, there was still suffering. Mary was weeping at the tomb, the disciples were terrified and huddled behind locked doors, and many were bewildered at the news that Jesus' body was gone. Like the Israelites who were dismayed by the approaching Egyptian army, the disciples couldn't see how any good could come from a crucified, dead Lord.

Although their very eternal salvation had been won that Good Friday, they couldn't believe it. But then the impossible happened. Jesus showed Himself to them raised and living. And their hearts rejoiced.

It may not feel like Easter, but Christ is risen indeed! Nothing can change that. We celebrate the resurrection in good times and bad, knowing that God always gives us a way of escape in every trial. The worst evil that can come to us is death, and yet that only brings us quicker to rejoicing with our Lord. To die is now gain, thanks be to God! And when Christ returns, He will raise our bodies to be like His glorious body. The troubles of sin and death and devil will be no more and we will only have joy forevermore. Amen.