

## Easter Sunday

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Immanuel Lutheran Macomb IL

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### Was or Is?

Christ is Risen! (He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!)

Matthew 28:5 But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified." (Mat 28:5 ESV)

Before I speak on the text, I want to read a portion of the first reading for this Easter Sunday from Peter's sermon as found in Acts, chapter 10, verse 35.

"But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him."

The question for this Easter Sunday therefore is: "Who disagrees with this passage that if you want to be accepted by Him you better fear Him and work righteousness?" Now why would this reading and passage be chosen for Easter Sunday? Is this not to be the greatest festival of the Christian Church celebrating the resurrection of our LORD and Savior Jesus Christ from the dead? What's this about that we better fear Him and work righteousness or else we will not be accepted by Him?

This passage from Acts is part of a witness that Peter delivered to the Roman centurion Cornelius and his family. As is well known, there was no love between Jew and Gentile in Jesus' day. Gentiles were considered infidels unless they had converted to the Jewish faith and even then they were still not permitted into the temple proper to worship being classified with women, children, the sick and the infirm.

But Peter had a vision on a roof of a large blanket descending from heaven upon which was unclean food not to be eaten according to the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament covenant. However, now that Christ has risen from the dead, there was no need to keep the ceremonial laws. For they had been instituted by God to remind the people of the need for a Savior that would take away the sins of the world. Once the Messianic Lamb was sacrificed for us, there was no need to perform and follow the ceremonial laws.

But what about this need to fear God and work righteousness if one wants to be accepted by God? Does this not contradict the Easter message that whoever believes in Jesus will receive the remission of sins? Our confusion increases when we hear Peter in verse 43 that "whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins." How can Peter deliver that good news in the same message that he speaks about fearing God and working righteousness? Does that make any sense? If you are not yet somewhat confused, permit me to confuse you even further. During the crucifixion we heard Jesus speak from the cross, "It is finished." The question that comes to mind then is "If Jesus said on Good Friday, 'It is finished,' how come we need an Easter Sunday?"

A good friend of mine is constructing a hope chest out of cherry wood on the outside and cedar wood on the inside for each of his six grandchildren. After about four months, he finished the first one and had five more to go. Which day do you think he most enjoyed? The day he finished making the hope chest or the day when he and his wife presented it to the first granddaughter? Certainly the day he finished was indeed joyous, yet it hardly compared to the joy found on the face of the little girl when she received the gift made for her with her own initials enscribed on it.

There is a difference then between the work being finished and the work being delivered. Few if any people at the foot of the cross on that Good Friday would be aware of the true significance of that death until Easter Sunday. While the mission of the Son of God to pay for our sins by death was truly finished on Good Friday, it lay the groundwork for both the work of the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Which returns us to our text when the angel says to the women at the empty tomb, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified." Every English translation of that verse has the phrase, "who was crucified." That is an error.

As Dr. James Voelz who wrote a commentary on the Gospel of Mark points out, the correct translation is "you seek Jesus who is crucified." "Who is???" The form of the verb is a perfect passive participle. It is used to emphasize the present ongoing result of a completed action. Permit me to use an example.

I'm walking down the street with my father. A friend of mine approaches us and asks me, "Tom, who is this who is with you?" I reply, "This WAS my father." After my friend leaves my father asks me what I meant. I tell him that though he brought me into the world with Mom, that was years ago. You get my point. Yes, parents brought us into the world but they presently are still our parents in feeding, clothing and housing us.

In a similar way it is true that Jesus was crucified on a Good Friday years ago but the results of that crucifixion continue. In other words, Jesus presently is our Savior because of the cross. In I Corinthians 1:23, note how Paul does not say that we preach Christ who was crucified but uses the present:

*but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,  
(1Co 1:23 ESV)*

Certainly on Good Friday the specific mission for which Jesus came was finished. Your sins were nailed to the cross. They were paid for. But now it is time for Jesus as the crucified One to continue the work of salvation in distributing the results of the cross to the Church through the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

But the words “It is finished” mean more than that the work of Jesus Christ has been completed as though the cross was step one to be followed by the next steps of the resurrection, the ascension, Pentecost, making disciples of all people, and so forth. The cross is really the foundation of all that follows. Apart from the cross, there can be no resurrection, no ascension, no Pentecost as well as no message to be preached.

Which brings us back to the first confusion of this sermon. Why then does Peter speak about fearing God and working righteousness in order to be accepted by God? Peter’s words are in stark contrast to many today who don’t teach that we need to be accepted by God but instead that we need to accept God into our hearts. The text is clear. We do not do the accepting; God accepts us. But how can we daily sinners ever be acceptable to Him?

This may sound strange but you know what is worse than sinning each day? What is worse is that you refuse to confess it. On the radio a woman had phoned Law and Gospel insisting that the way to keep fellowship with God is to be completely obedient. When I asked her if she was sinless, she could think of no sins at all. How sad, that she was unaware of actually sinning right then and there. For as the Bible reveals, “If we say we have no sin, we are liars.” You see, while Christ died to forgive our sins, the work of that crucified Jesus goes on in our lives each and every day as we confess our sins and know He is faithful to forgive our sins.

So what is this. about fearing God and working righteousness? What does Easter reveal about that requirement? It reveals the same about that requirement as it reveals about the requirement to pay for your sins. To explain, Easter is God’s exclamation mark that the payment for your sins was accomplished by Him without any help from you. The credit for your salvation is totally the work of the Son, the Father and the Holy Spirit.

We speak of being converted as being justified and the ongoing life of the Christian as being sanctified. Yet, both justification and sanctification are the work of God. How so? We can understand that paying for our sins necessitated God’s death and resurrection but is not the requirements to fear God and work righteousness on our shoulders? While becoming a Christian is God’s work, is not remaining a Christian our work and responsibility?

It will become clearer to you during the weeks through the Ascension to Pentecost that your entire salvation is the work of God. On this Day we can point out that even when they realized that Jesus rose from the dead, the disciples cowered in fear in an upper room imagining what the Son of God would do to those who denied Him and fled from Him at the Garden of Gethsemane. That is why the first words of Jesus to His disciples were so comforting, “Peace be with you.”

The peace between God and man had taken place at that cross. But until God revealed it to the disciples and placed saving faith in their hearts, even they were as ignorant of the true significance of the cross as were the unbelieving Jewish religious leaders. True fear of God is simply the recognition on our part that we continue to sin each and every day.

The works of righteousness now spontaneously occur within each believer as the Holy Spirit moves us to respond in love to God and man. These works of righteousness are not our good works but are referred to as fruit of the Holy Spirit. They soon become so natural to us that we are unaware of the Holy Spirit doing them through us. Yet on Judgment Day, you will be totally overwhelmed by God's declaration to you that you have the works of righteousness necessary in order for you to be acceptable to God. Then and there you will receive an even greater awareness of the fact that your entire salvation from start to finish is a gift from God.

Do not be concerned that your sins have not been paid for. For Christ has died for them! Do not be concerned that what He did was not sufficient. For God the Father raised Him from the dead! Do not be concerned that you are not properly fearing God and working righteousness. For the Holy Spirit has made your body His temple through baptism! All of these concerns are answered on this most holy day when we respond with:

CHRIST IS RISEN with  
HE IS RISEN INDEED. ALLELUIA!!!!!!!!!!

Amen.

May the work of the Holy Trinity which passes all our understanding, continue to sustain us in the one true faith of the CRUCIFIED Christ forever and ever. Amen.

#### **Acts 10:34-43**

34 Then Peter opened *his* mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality.

35 "But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.

36 "The word which *God* sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ -- He is Lord of all --

37 "that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached:

38 "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

39 "And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree.

40 "Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly,

41 "not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, *even* to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.

42 "And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God *to be* Judge of the living and the dead.

43 "To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins."

## Prayer of the Church    The Resurrection of Our Lord

Almighty God, You kept Your promise and delivered up Your own Son to be our Savior. By His sacrificial death, our sins are forgiven, and by His rising again, we have the hope of everlasting life. Keep us in this holy joy throughout the Easter season and in all our daily lives, that we may not be afraid before our enemies nor give into the temptation of despair in the days of our troubles. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Everlasting Lord, the things of this life come and go and only Your Word is eternal. Give us wisdom to use well the things of this world, that they may glorify You and serve Your purpose. During this time of the coronavirus help us as we care for our families and loved ones, and keep us from forgetting the stranger in our midst, the unemployed, the homeless and the oppressed. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Father of all mercies, show Your everlasting kindness to the sick, those who suffer and all people according to their need. Grant them healing as You will, strength for the day, patience under trials and peace at the last *especially on all whom we name in our hearts before You.* Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of grace and glory, You have delivered us from sin and brought us to new and everlasting life in Your Son. Bring to nothing all the efforts of the enemies of Your Gospel, and fill the hearts of Your people with peace so that we may pray with confidence according to our Savior's bidding and rejoice in this Easter joy now and always; through Jesus Christ, our crucified, risen and eternal Lord, who with You and the Holy Spirit are one God, now and always. **Amen.**