

✠ ✠ ✠ JESU JUVA ✠ ✠ ✠

QUASIMODO GENITI / THE OCTAVE OF THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD

Text: Ezekiel 37:1-14; St. John 20:19-31

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED! ALLELUIA!

JESUS was dead, let there be no doubt whatever about that. He was brought before Pilate, the Roman governor, to He be scourged, who then delivered Him over to the Jews that his sentence of death by crucifixion be carried out and witnessed by all of Jerusalem; the thrust of a Roman spear made sure of His death. JESUS was crucified, dead, and buried. The women who followed after Him observed the tomb and how His body was laid. A huge stone was rolled across the entrance to His tomb, and the grave having been sealed, a guard was set. JESUS, that troubler of Jerusalem, was surely dead!

Still, JESUS is risen from the dead, let there be no doubt whatever about that! The faithful women reported this to the Disciples early that first Easter morning. Saints Peter and John raced to the tomb, finding it empty with the stone rolled away. Peering inside, they saw the linen burial cloths and the napkin on which JESUS' head had been laid. Seeing all this, John believed that JESUS had risen from the dead.

Mary Magdalene had even seen and touched JESUS, grasping His feet. JESUS called her by name and she believed that JESUS had risen from the dead. Yet, when she told the other disciples the joyous news, they did not believe her. They could not believe because they had not seen, and what Mary had to say did not make any sense to them because it was, for them, just a far beyond belief.

I wonder if God's question of Ezekiel made sense to him. Ezekiel was looking over a valley full of dry bones, and God asked of him, "*Can these bones live?*" Of course, God already knew the answer, but I am sure that even a man of such great faith as Ezekiel may have had, if not a moment of doubt, at least one of uncertainty. His answer to God's question may be proof of this. He answered the LORD, "*O LORD God, You know,*" as in, "*only God knows.*"

Ezekiel's reaction is only natural. After all, one could get a bullhorn and put it next to the ear of the dead and scream until one is blue in the face and the result would be predictably the same each and every time. The body would not move; indeed, it could not respond in any way. It is dead. There is no power we possess that can make a dead body live—not even our own dead body.

So, it was, for Israel whom the dry bones in Ezekiel's vision represent. God had judged the Israelites and found them wanting. Israel, God's chosen people, had turned her back on God and God had pronounced and executed His terrible sentence. As Ezekiel writes:

*“An end has come, The end has come;
It has dawned for you;
Behold, it has come!
Doom has come to you, you who dwell in the land.”*

Israel was carried off into exile, Jerusalem and the temple destroyed. The nation was completely “*cut off*.” In cruel exile and captivity, the Israelites lived in fear, despair, and utter hopelessness.

Fear, despair, and hopelessness had taken hold of JESUS' disciples as well. They were gathered together and hiding under one roof. They were afraid for their lives, afraid for their future, and afraid of those who had orchestrated their LORD'S crucifixion. They were hiding from their fellow Jews, whom, they surely thought, were coming for them next. Since the cruel events of Good Friday, all seemed hopeless.

So, just what is it you fear? What fills you with despair and hopelessness? What keeps you locked in, locked up, and locked away? What are the locks and deadbolts in your life? What is it that robs you of peace and joy? Is it fear of violence, of suffering, of disease? Perhaps you suffer from a fear of persecution, punishment, mockery, loneliness, or isolation? Do you love your life too much—so much so that you fear death?

Fear of any kind limits us. It locks us into ourselves, locks us up in our own little rooms; fear locks us away from one another and from God. Fear makes life a prison house, a fortress against the forces that threaten us—both real and imagined. Our fortress against such forces may be sex, pornography, drunkenness, drugs; it may be more innocuous, such as working long hours just to avoid going home and facing our responsibilities as husband or wife, or as a father or mother. It may keep us locked away for fear of getting sick and dying. Our fortress can be anything—anything in which we attempt to hide from ourselves, from our family and community, from God, and the pain and misery of day-to-day living in this world.

Yet, fear, despair, and hopelessness are even worse than simply building fortresses to deal with daily life. They are the fruit of unbelief. They are the failure to fear, love, and trust in God above all things. Fear, despair, and hopelessness are what happens to us when we trust in things, and ourselves, instead of God. Witness what the fear that took

hold of our country, indeed, our world during the recent pandemic. What we witnessed is what happens when we leave God out of the picture while we attempt to gain total control of our lives, setting ourselves up as little gods and captains of our own destiny, only to find out that about the only control we have over anything in this life is the choice of what we will wear when we get up in the morning or whether we will even bother to get up at all.

Into that little fortress of fear, filled with the anxiety of hopelessness, comes our LORD JESUS—JESUS who was slain and yet lives. Into our fortress comes JESUS, humbly, quietly. He does not break down the doors. The One who burst from the tomb without bothering to roll away the stone has no need to break down locked doors. Indeed, JESUS does not even bother to knock.

In that locked room the evening following His resurrection, the first words JESUS spoke to His Disciples were words of blessed absolution: *“Peace be with you.”* His words give what they say: peace, true, divine peace. JESUS said, *“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”*

Our LORD’s peace comes in the midst of turmoil, unrest, fear, despair, and hopelessness, and yes, even in the midst of tragedy and pandemics. JESUS tells us, *“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world, you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”* JESUS, the Lamb of God, is our Peace who conquered sin and death by dying and rising, and now comes in peace to bring His people life.

What comfort JESUS’ words of peace must have brought to the disciples that first Easter evening! They had all failed Him in His hour of glory. Saint Peter had denied Him three times. All the disciples, save Saint John, abandoned JESUS as He was arrested, tried, nailed to, and died upon His Cross. None of the disciples believed His Words—that on the third day, the first day of the week, He would rise from the dead. Their hearts were filled with fear, despair, and hopelessness. Yet, JESUS does not belittle them for their lack of faith. Instead, He comes graciously to them speaking His words of peace.

His peace is real peace; as real as His wounds, the nail marks in His hands and feet, and the wound of the spear that pierced His side. From these rich wounds come the peace that JESUS speaks. *“The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes, we are healed.”*

Note well these stripes, these wounds, for by these wounds you are healed from the disease of sin and the death it brings. Recall these wounds when your life is in turmoil and upheaval. Ponder them when you are filled with fear, locked up in your little

fortress, and despairing of your life. Hold the Cross of CHRIST before your weeping eyes. For JESUS' wounds are the wounds from which the cleansing Blood of God's SON flowed upon the wood of the Cross, the very lintel and doorpost of heaven, for you. In the wounds of CHRIST you will find peace.

The wounds of JESUS mark Him as the Crucified One, the One whose Body was nailed to the Cross for the life of the world. He is not a phantom or ghost. He is no imposter. This is the true Body of JESUS risen from the dead. This is God in the flesh—conceived by the HOLY SPIRIT and born of the Virgin Mary!

JESUS' Disciples recognized Him by the marks of His suffering which He bore in His flesh. By His Words and by His wounds in that true Body, JESUS gives His disciples peace and joy in place of fear, despair, and hopelessness. *“Then the disciples were glad when they saw the LORD.”* Their eyes, having been opened, saw that there was nothing left to fear; JESUS was with them!

So, it is, for you and me. There is nothing left to fear, JESUS is with us! His wounds, testifying of our righteousness in Him before the judgment seat of our FATHER in Heaven have swallowed up all there was to fear. JESUS has taken on sin, death, and the devil and has defeated them through His death on His Cross. In doing so, JESUS breathes His life into our lifeless souls. We are dead to sin but alive in CHRIST JESUS. He died and lives again and says to each of us, *“Peace be with you.”* Through His death and resurrection, our graves are opened. No longer must we live in fear, despair, and hopelessness. No longer are we cut off from the land of the living.

JESUS gives the same Words and wounds of peace to us in the waters of Holy Baptism and in the bread and wine, Body and Blood, of His Holy Supper. We are not given to see JESUS, as did His disciples, but He is no less present for us right here today than He was for His disciples in that little locked room so long ago. For JESUS has said, *“For where two or three are gathered together in My Name, I am there in the midst of them.”* Yes, we are no poorer for not having seen the risen JESUS with our eyes, for JESUS also said, *“Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed.”*

Indeed, we are blessed in our not seeing. We have JESUS' Words of forgiveness spoken to us and His SPIRIT breathed upon us. When we eat and drink His Body and Blood, His rich wounds, still visible before the throne of God the FATHER, are gloriously presented to us in the lowly forms of bread and wine. JESUS gives us these gifts so that we too, may believe that He is the CHRIST, the SON of the living God, the One who died and rose for us, and in believing we, too, *“have life in His Name.”*

There is not a day of the week that JESUS does not come to you, His disciples. In Christ's Kingdom, every Sunday is an Easter, and every day is a first day of the week, a

new creation, where the crucified and risen LORD is present with His disciples with His Words of peace, with His wounds, and with His breath and SPIRIT.

Hear now JESUS' Words of peace: *"Peace be with you."*

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

✠✠✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠✠✠

Rev. Raymond D. Parent II
Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church
Crestview, Florida
4/7/24 A✠D