

tyrs. For, above all else, the message of His Resurrection from the dead on the third day is the message of God's love, that His Son came into the world to bring salvation, peace and reconciliation with God.

This is the message Christ has commissioned to be proclaimed by His Apostolic Church. Therefore, we too must believe He has risen, and be glad.

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¹ This sermon was originally written on the Epistle for Holy Communion on the First Sunday after Easter, 2012.

² *An Alternative Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised in 1928)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, WITH THE ADDITIONS AND DEVIATIONS PROPOSED IN 1928 36 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxix (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxvii (CIPBC 1963).

³ Isaiah 51:1-16 (KJV).

⁴ Exodus 14:1-end (KJV).

⁵ St. John 20:1-23 (KJV).

⁶ St. John 20:20b (KJV).

⁷ I Corinthians 15:1 ff.

⁸ Isaiah 53:10 (KJV).

⁹ Romans 4:22-25 (KJV).

¹⁰ Ephesians 1:3-6 (KJV).

¹¹ St. Mark 10:32-34 (KJV).

¹² St. John 3:17 (KJV).

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SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER Easter Day¹

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fifty-first Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.³

“Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged. Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him. For the LORD shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.

“Hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation: for a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light of the people. My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth, and mine arms shall judge the people; the isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust. Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished.

“Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings. For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation.

“Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab [RAY-hobb], and wounded the dragon? Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for

the ransomed to pass over? Therefore the redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away. I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; And forgettest the LORD thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor? The captive exileneth that he may be loosed, and that he should not die in the pit, nor that his bread should fail. But I am the LORD thy God, that divided the sea, whose waves roared: The LORD of hosts is his name. And I have put my words in thy mouth, and I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, Thou art my people.”

Or,

Here beginneth the fourteenth Chapter of the Second Book of Moses, called Exodus.⁴

“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they turn and encamp before Pihahiroth [*pye-huh-HIGH-roth*], between Migdol [*MIGG-doll*] and the sea, over against Baal-zephon [*bay-ull-ZEE-funn*]: before it shall ye encamp by the sea. For Pharaoh [*FAY-roe*] will say of the children of Israel, They are entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in. And I will harden Pharaoh’s [*FAY-roze*] heart, that he shall follow after them; and I will be honoured upon Pharaoh [*FAY-roe*], and upon all his host; that the Egyptians may know that I am the LORD. And they did so.

“And it was told the king of Egypt that the people fled: and the heart of Pharaoh [*FAY-roe*] and of his servants was turned against the people, and they said, Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us? And he made

highways and hedges and compel people to come in that His house may be filled. It means that you are here on a mission of peace, to help your neighbor obtain peace with God through Jesus Christ.

“And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith [SETH] unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.”

This, too, speaks of the Church as the Body of Christ. Of course, it speaks directly of a Sacrament that belongs to the Apostolic ministry of Christ’s own priesthood though ordained men. And I have challenged those who reject our belief in the Sacrament of Absolution, in these words: “If your church has no one in it who believes that he has the authority to forgive sins, how can you say that you are in the same Church founded by the Risen Lord Jesus Christ through his Apostles?”

More largely, it speaks of God’s purpose that forgiveness of sins be spread far and wide. Yes, forgiveness is conditional. Indeed, after the General Confession (for example) you hear conditions in the Absolution that follows, namely, “hearty repentance and true faith.” “Hearty” means simply, from the heart, or, sincere. Repentance must be sincere; not necessarily emotional (though that can be a very good sign), but always sincere. And “true faith” may be as small as a grain of mustard seed, for even that little is enough. More largely, the Good News is that the risen Christ has commissioned the Church of His Apostles to be His instrument of forgiveness, not of condemnation.

In all of history, no line has been more important than this: “*Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.*” His Resurrection was a fact they could see, hear and touch. To this fact they have borne witness by preaching the Gospel, their own eyewitness testimony courageously declared, unrelentingly declared even to the shedding of their blood as His faithful mar-

God. Somehow, it meant that everything He had suffered was part of the plan; it demonstrated that He had been in control all along; it meant that the fear and suffering of Friday was not a defeat, but rather the very plan, just as their Master had foretold several times. For example, hear these words from the Gospel of Mark:

“And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid. And he took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto him, Saying, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles: And they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him: and the third day he shall rise again.”¹¹

The Resurrection demonstrated that Christ had come to bring salvation, that God had come in peace rather than as an enemy: *“For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.”¹²*

“Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord. Now it was time for the Lord to send them out: Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.”

This means that the Apostles were, and therefore the Apostolic Church is, in the world as the Body of Christ, the extension of His Incarnation. It means the Apostolic Church, including you and me, is here to assist and work with God in the service and ministry of reconciliation, calling all men everywhere to repent, filling the world with the Good News that Jesus Christ has taken away sin and conquered death. It means the Apostolic Church, of which you are a part, is to go into the

ready his chariot, and took his people with him: And he took six hundred chosen chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt, and captains over every one of them. And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh [**FAY-roe**] king of Egypt, and he pursued after the children of Israel: and the children of Israel went out with an high hand. But the Egyptians pursued after them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh [**FAY-roe**], and his horsemen, and his army, and overtook them encamping by the sea, beside Pi-hahiroth [**pye-huh-HIGH-roth**], before Baal-zephon [**bay-ull-ZEE-funn**].

“And when Pharaoh [**FAY-roe**] drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD. And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness.

“And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew [**SHOW**] to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.

“And the LORD said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward: But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea. And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them: and I will get me honour upon Pharaoh [**FAY-roe**], and upon all his host, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten me honour upon Pharaoh, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen.

“And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: And

it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night. And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.

“And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh’s [FAY-roze] horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the LORD looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians, And took off their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily: so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the LORD fighteth for them against the Egyptians.

“And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen. And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh [FAY-roe] that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them. But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. Thus the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore. And Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and his servant Moses.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.”¹⁰

That God sees you in the Person of His only begotten Son means that, even beyond forgiveness, you have been justified as if you had never been born in sin, and had never sinned yourself. That is justification; that is adoption as a child of God, that is what it means to be “in Christ.”

This is why it is so very tragic when any child of God chooses to live as merely a son of this fallen world (*“For as in Adam all die: even so in Christ shall all be made alive”*). You do not belong to this world of sin and death, and have no business living as if you did. Because we are justified freely in the Risen Christ, we are called to sanctification, that process whereby we become saints.

A saint is, simply, a holy person. In an objective sense you have been made holy by having been separated from the world of sin and death, and set apart unto God. This was done in your baptism. But, in terms of the life you live here on earth, as we also have seen in the Epistles of St. Paul, you have the vocation, that is the *calling*, to become holy, to be a saint, conformed to the image of Christ in this world. Growing in the grace of God and acquiring holy virtues, above all charity, is the vocation every child of God has in common. This we cannot do if we choose to live in the darkness of carnality and selfishness.

The disciples were glad when they saw the Lord, though as yet they did not fully comprehend all that it meant to do so. But they could quickly comprehend that Christ’s Resurrection demonstrated the goodwill, the love and saving intention, of

mony was a shared testimony, something that by its nature cannot be dismissed as a delusion. His death was a fact, and His Resurrection was a fact. But now we must see not only these facts, but the meaning of these facts. His Resurrection showed that He had been, all along, exactly who he claimed to be. He was vindicated. Indeed, before Abraham, He had been and always was I AM. He was, and throughout eternity had always been, One with the Father. And, yet though He was the one *vindicated*, that is whose words were proved true, it is we who are *justified* freely by His grace.

His vindication was made into our justification, for now Christ Jesus the Lord had taken away sin and had defeated death. If we hold fast and believe, we will spend eternity not only as forgiven sinners, whose Lord died to bring that forgiveness to his people, for even beyond having been forgiven, if we hold fast and believe, we will spend eternity as the children of God through the grace of the risen Lord, fully justified as if we had never sinned at all. We are forgiven because He died, and we are justified because He rose again and ever lives to make intercession for us. That means we have been made righteous, as if we had never sinned at all, in the sight of God. Forgiveness is made richer because of Divine forgetfulness, as the Bible also states plainly: He *forgets* our sins. So, in the eyes of God, because Christ rose again from the dead, we are restored fully and given the inheritance that our first father lost.

We have been allowed to start all over again, and to become God's own children through Christ. This has everything to do with that little two word phrase that St. Paul repeats throughout his Epistles: "*In Christ*." It is a small phrase, and thus easily overlooked. And, yet, it is our identity in the eyes of God; it is your identity, and has been ever since the day you were baptized into Christ. If you are "*in Christ*" and if you abide and dwell in Christ, God sees you in the Person of His only begotten Son. He sees you in His Son, the one Beloved of the Father in all eternity.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twentieth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. John.⁵

"The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene [*magg-duh-LEE-knee*] early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith [**SETH**] unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him. Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre. So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre. And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed. For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again unto their own home.

"But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith [**SETH**] unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith [**SETH**] unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith [**SETH**] unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith [**SETH**] unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith [**SETH**] unto him, Rabboni [*rah-BOW-nigh*]; which is to say, Master. Jesus saith [**SETH**] unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father;

and to my God, and your God. Mary Magdalene [*magg-duh-LEE-knee*] came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her.

“Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith [*SETH*] unto them, Peace be unto you. And when he had so said, he shewed [*SHOWD*] unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith [*SETH*] unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “*Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.*”⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

This is one of the most important lines in all of Scripture. Our faith is not based on religious concepts and ideas, but on solid fact. They were glad, and that means they saw and believed. When St. Paul summarized the Gospel for the Church in Corinth,⁷ he recited four facts: 1) Christ died for our sins; 2) He was buried; 3) He rose the third day; and 4) He appeared to witnesses. These facts of the Gospel were “according to the Scriptures,” meaning, these facts fulfilled the Scriptural foretelling of the prophets that Messiah would come the first time as priest and sacrifice, and that after His death He would rise again:

“Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul

*an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.”*⁸

He had died as the sin offering, and now He was alive again, a man once dead, but who prolongs His days as the one in whose hand the will of God prospers forever. For a dead man to prolong his days, he must rise again. And what is the will of God that prospers in his hand? Our Collect for today provides part of the answer: “Almighty Father, who hast given thine only Son to die for our sins, and to rise again for our justification...” These words were drawn from St. Paul’s Epistle to the Church in Rome:

*“And therefore it [faith] was imputed to him [Abraham] for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.”*⁹

On Good Friday we had a very mournful service, for that was the day in which Christ fulfilled the Scriptures of the prophets, that He would die as the offering for sin, fulfilling as well the entire symbolic system of sacrifice in the Law of Moses. On that day we saw Him as Passover Lamb and as the Atonement slain on *Yom Kippor*. We saw His soul sorrowful unto death the night before in the garden, and we were with Him at the Cross. On Sunday, that is on Easter, we were suddenly glad, sharing the joy of those who first witnessed the sight of the risen Christ. “And when he had so said, he shewed [*SHOWD*] unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord. “

Our faith is based on fact. They saw Him risen again, and they witnessed this sight together as a group. Their testi-