

I Died, and Behold I Am Alive

Easter 2

Pastor Josh Frazee

Rev. 1:4-18

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Your glorious name (LSB Altar Book).” How often do you stop and consider these words which are read just before the singing of the Sanctus? If your answer is that you don’t, you are not alone. It has only been recently that some theologians have paused to ponder what we hear in these words, and the life to which they point.

In speaking and hearing these words, we recall that we are joined with not only the entire Christian church on earth, but also with the full company of heaven in our worship. This happens for the entire service, but we might especially remember this fact when we hear these words and then sing with the angels from Isaiah chapter six: “Holy, holy, holy Lord God of pow’r and might: Heaven and earth are full of Your glory (LSB, p.161).”

So we are joined to the full company of heaven, and we learn from John’s Revelation that that includes “a great multitude...from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands... ‘These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation(, who) have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 7:9b; 14b).”

In worship, then, we join with the full Church of Christ Jesus on earth, the angels and archangels, and those loved ones who have passed away in the faith before us. That is how Luke was able to quote Jesus saying, “‘He (that is, God) is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive (Luke 20:38, NIV).”

This brings us, then, to our sermon text for this morning, from the Epistle text, Revelation chapter one. In it, we hear our Lord Jesus say, “‘I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.’” In this study, we’ll learn how we also have died and been made alive in Christ Jesus, and how He keeps us alive through His Word and Sacrament, received in the company of all believers.

1

Verse

John, the author of the Gospel, begins his letter of his revelation addressing it to the seven churches in Asia. Then he extends the greeting and blessing of grace and peace from “him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ.” To Jesus, though, John adds the Easter-appropriate adverbial clause “the firstborn of the dead.”

To many today, the idea of rising from the dead can sound impossible, and as Luther once put it, annoying. They wonder how anyone could believe that there is anything after death. For them, all there is the here and now, and the way that they live their lives demonstrates it. They do not care if feelings are hurt in relationships or in establishing long-lasting ones. They want instant gratification; and as Reader’s Digest aptly quoted Carrie Fisher: “Instant gratification takes too long.” Even with the spread of technology and communication, it is still possible to not see someone again, or to avoid them, so these people believe there is no need for them to make amends.

But for us, for whom Jesus is risen, risen indeed, Alleluia, we know that He was only the firstborn of the dead. There is eternal life, and relationships can and will last longer than just the here and now. We believe

what God says when He says that men and women become one flesh when they are joined in marriage, and so a sin against one is a sin against both. We find this in both testaments, in Leviticus in the Old and in Matthew in the New. In addition, to sin in any way against any person is to sin against a brother or sister of the flesh. We believe we are all related if we go back far enough. We believe these things because they are what God tells us through His Word.

Because Jesus is risen from the dead, Satan, the world, and the evil forces of this life work all the harder to get us to forget what Jesus has done. They desire that we stay out of the Word so that we forget what it says. They desire that we stay out of church so that we forget we have forgiveness in Christ Jesus' death and resurrection. And they desire that we avoid fellowship with our fellow baptized brothers and sisters so that we forget that we have been baptized into our Lord's death. They want us to neglect these things so that we will not hear the Spirit of God directing us to our salvation in our baptisms and Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross.

2

Verse

Many today would have us think of Jesus as a great prophet or a king cut off before He could take an earthly throne. They are okay with either of these, just so that we don't think of His third office: that of priest. They don't want us to think about how, like any good priest, Jesus made a sacrifice to take our sins from us. But God's Word clearly reveals that Jesus "loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father."

What is more, our enemies desire that we forget this truth so that we do not use our faith to bring others to God our Father. Commentary notes say that "The Church exercises its priestly function by offering intercessory prayers and by proclaiming 'the excellencies of Him who called (them) out of darkness into His marvelous light' (1 Pt 2:9)." In making these proclamations, it is our hope that others will come into Jesus' light and share in the Gospel truth of His death for their sins, and His resurrection for their life eternal with Him.

Because of the enemies of the spiritual forces, sin, death, and the devil, many have not heard or do not understand. Yet Jesus will still come. "Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen."

We desire, then, that all come to the light of the truth of the Gospel, and at the same time, we hope for Jesus' return—the one "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." That is what we desire through God's Spirit, and yet, a part of us will not want Jesus to return. It is the very part of us that wants to do our own thing, to go after the world in its desire for instant gratification, and the part for which Christ our Lord went to the cross to die.

Remember, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, that Jesus Christ, the very Lamb of God, was flogged and crucified for your sins so that you bear them no more. Then, on account of His mercies, you were baptized in His Name so that you might have life, and have it to the fullest. You were buried with Him and have rose again with Him to a new life. Live it.

3

Verse

Live it, and "Fear not," for as Jesus says, "I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades."

When we hear these words, we might turn just as John did, and see “in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters.” While these words may sound intimidating to those who don’t understand, we believe and trust that they mean that Jesus is co-equal with God the Father, as He was described in the Old Testament.

In order to trust that we have the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting, we must know that the One who secured it was not only “like a son of man” but also true God. With these words, John gives us that assurance. He, “your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus (bears witness to his revelation received) on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.”

Because John’s word is God’s Word, and because it bears witness to Jesus’ manliness and Godliness, we trust and believe that His life, death, and resurrection were for you and me. He died, and behold He is alive forevermore; and in your baptism into Him, you died, and behold you are alive forevermore. You need not fear the condemnations or the imagery in John’s Revelation or in any of the Word of God; instead, you may trust and hope in the abundance of promises in Christ Jesus, in Revelation, and throughout God’s Word. In the Name of Jesus, who is and who was and who is to come. Amen.