

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Easter 2B
April 7, 2024
1 John 1:1-2:2

That Your Joy May Be Full

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life- the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us- that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. (1 John 1:1-4 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

Alleluia! Christ is risen! (He is risen indeed! Alleluia!)

The resurrection of our Lord Jesus is too magnificent, too important, too far-reaching to be limited to one day of celebration. Thus, the Church celebrates it for seven weeks. Now, certainly much of the pomp and the majesty of Easter Sunday have faded, even as fewer people are here this week than last. Still, we live in the light of Easter, for the events of that first Easter morning have transformed our lives, such that they will never be the same. We have great hope and exceeding joy knowing that Christ is no longer dead, but risen! Our God is the living God, the God who never leaves us and who never forsakes us. Ours is a hope that even outlives the grave, for Christ has given us victory over the grave. Yes, the cry of Easter continues throughout the year: "Oh death where is your victory? Oh death, where is your sting?" Thanks be to God who gives us the victory in our Lord Jesus Christ! (1 Cor. 15:55).

Now, if Jesus' resurrection from the dead teaches us anything about the heart of God, it teaches us that He finds great value in the body, the flesh and blood that He creates. Jesus, though He "was made man," would NOT undergo the decay that is customary when men die. Rather His body would rise triumphantly over death and the grave. His body would be glorified. He would ascend to the right hand of the Father, and He would do so, not as some disembodied spirit, but as the God / Man. Jesus reigns, even now, clothed in the human flesh that so endeared Him to lost sinners like you and me. His hands and His feet remain marked with the print of the nails, for though His body has been glorified, His scars have become signs of honor, signs even of victory.

The apostle John, who wrote today's Epistle and Gospel readings, writes toward faith in Christ. That's his primary purpose (John 20:31). Toward that end, one of his emphases is the importance of Jesus' human nature. He does this chiefly to show that God redeems us, that is,

that He buys us back from the curse of sin, by entering into our lives, by becoming the very creature that He intends to save. Remember, in John's Gospel he says, "the Word was made FLESH and dwelt among us." And here, in his first Epistle, he says, "that which was from the beginning, which we have HEARD, which we have SEEN with our eyes, which we have LOOKED upon, and our hands have HANDLED, concerning the Word of Life."

For John, and the other disciples, it was every bit as important to believe in and to confess the humanity of Jesus as it was to believe in and to confess His deity. And for John, and the other disciples, there was no shame in Jesus having been made man either. In fact, they understood that Jesus' humility consisted, not in His having become man. Rather, Jesus was humbled because, in becoming man, He set aside the full use of His divine power. In doing so, He was humbled "to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Thus, we see that Jesus isn't ashamed to enter our world. He isn't ashamed to take on flesh and blood. He isn't ashamed to be believed in and confessed as the One, "who for us men and for our salvation, was Incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and WAS MADE MAN." Jesus isn't ashamed to take frail flesh and die. In fact, in doing so, that is, in becoming man, to die for the sins of man, Jesus glorifies His Father in heaven. The most human of actions, the crying out from the cross, the bleeding and the dying, those things become of the greatest spiritual importance and significance, even though they seem so beneath the majesty and the glorious working of God.

The reason that John spoke so eloquently and forthrightly about the human nature of Jesus is because the world was filled with those intent on dividing everything in life between spiritual and physical things. Spiritual things, of course, are considered good and holy, while physical things, like a body, though necessary, are considered mundane, even evil in some circles.

Now, this kind of heresy is nothing new. In fact, it seems to reign supreme in many areas of today's society. How else can it be explained that one's personhood, one's very identity, is wrapped up in how one feels about oneself, even to the point of altering one's very body to match those feelings? After all, one's spirit must be true and the body is merely a shell that confines it. So if the body doesn't match the spirit, simply change the body. The same holds true for those advocating suicide, assisted or not. Quite often, it's a matter of wanting to free the soul from the shackle of the body. What's not admitted is that the spirit, the feelings, are corrupted by sin and are therefore not a trustworthy guide in such things, or in anything for that matter.

Yet, the emphasis on Jesus' humanity, His fleshliness, shows the error of the heresy. For the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord shows that our lives are not so rigidly divided into compartments, the physical and the spiritual. For all that Jesus has done for us and for our salvation was done in His body and Spirit as He redeemed us by His bloody sacrifice and His bodily resurrection from the dead.

Furthermore, since Jesus has physically risen from the dead, He is with us even now in His flesh. To be sure we can't see and handle Him as John and the disciples did, but He is with us through His Word and most certainly in His Body and Blood in the Sacrament. You see, there were those in the sixteenth century, at the time of Martin Luther, who agreed that Jesus was substantially present in the Bread and Wine, but they understood it as only a spiritual presence. In effect, this way of thinking, and believing, takes Jesus OUT of the Sacrament. It's a confession of His real absence.

Yet, when Jesus says, "This is My Body" and "This is My Blood," He means exactly what He says. His body and blood born of Mary, His body crucified, dead, and buried, His body raised from the dead and seen and touched by the disciples, is actually present for us to eat and to drink that through it our sins are forgiven and we have life with Him now and forever.

Indeed, Jesus is every bit as present with us in His Word and in His Body and Blood as He was with His disciples in the upper room. For His risen body, with His holy wounds, proved that this was the same Jesus they had seen crucified, dead, and buried. His bodily resurrection from the dead, which is still denied by many, shows that God takes our bodies seriously as well, after all, He created them.

John, as well as the other disciples, were captivated by the realization that Jesus came to them in the flesh! Even as they were amazed to realize that God raised Jesus' body from the dead! If Jesus' resurrection from the dead teaches us anything about the heart of God, it teaches us that He finds great value in the body, the flesh and blood that He creates. God cares, in other words, about every aspect of your life. It is all significant! It is all important! It is, dare I say, all holy and good! Thanks be to God for making it so. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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