

The Resurrection of Our Lord – 2023

Exodus 14:10 – 15:1

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

John 20:1-18

How many of y'all were rebellious in your youth? What were you rebelling against, exactly? John Cougar pretty much summed up my youth when he penned this line: "I fight authority, authority always wins." The Authority Song – it's a jammy little tune from 1983. Here're some of the lyrics: "So I call up my preacher I say: 'Gimme strength for Round 5.' He said: 'You don't need no strength, you need to grow up, son.' I said: 'Growing up leads to growing old and then to dying, And dying to me don't sound like all that much fun.' I fight authority, authority always wins." The vice-principle at my High School was the authority in that place. When I sat in his office I instinctively knew how things were going to play out. No joke, his name was Mr. Pigg. His secretary was Mrs. Perfect. Mr. Pigg didn't like me. The feeling was pretty mutual. I fight authority, authority always wins.

What is the authority in your life? Death? Is death an authority? Here are some of death's besties: ALS, leukemia, breast cancer, pancreatic cancer – are those things authorities? Rheumatoid arthritis, congestive heart failure, degenerative disk disease – are those things authorities? Alzheimer's disease, diabetes, muscular dystrophy – I fight authority, authority always wins. Multiple Sclerosis, autism, cerebral palsy – I fight authority, authority always wins. When Jesus came onto the scene His audience had never heard anything like it. St. Mark writes this: "...the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes" (Mark 1:28-29). Jesus is the Word made flesh. His authority is from everlasting to everlasting. His authority reaches into every corner of creation. "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life" (John 1:3-4a – NIV). Do y'all believe that life has authority?

God is omnipotent. That's authority, to be sure. When the Son of God ventured into this world, how would He use His authority? This Messianic King decided that it was a really good idea to be born in a stable and laid in, of all places, a feeding trough. All the fullness of the deity dwelled in bodily form and the Eternal King chooses to be born in lowliness. All the fullness of the deity dwelled in bodily form and the King of the universe chooses to be born in humility. The Son of God took up the form of a servant. God of God and Light of Light took up the form of a servant.

Is paralysis an authority? I'm pretty sure that the paralyzed man thought that it was. Some incredibly loyal friends brought a paralyzed man to Jesus. These great friends got creative. It was so crowded, no path could be found to the Teacher so they went on the roof and made a hole and let the man, still lying on his bed, down to where Jesus was (Luke 5:19). Paralysis, a bestie of death, was about to encounter Him who is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25). "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven" (Matthew 9:2). That's what Jesus said to the paralytic. The reaction was swift. The reaction was visceral.

You can't do that. Blasphemy; this man blasphemes. "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Luke 5:21). The scribes and the Pharisees; Jesus knew what they were thinking. This rabble-

rousing rabbi, this vagabond teacher, this plain-looking itinerant preacher, He doesn't have the authority to forgive sins. The Lord Christ has remarkable authority and He had come to use it. Everyone in that place was about to witness the authority of the One who is the Way and the Truth and the Life. "That you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" – he said to the man who was paralyzed – 'I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home'" (Luke 5). Immediately the paralyzed man rose up before them. Amazement seized them all. Those who witnessed Jesus using His authority were filled with awe and they glorified God.

To forgive sins; that is how the Lord Christ uses His authority. To forgive you your sins; to give you a life beyond this mortal sphere; to fill your being with His righteousness, His life; the Son of God anchored His authority to a cross. "No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again" (John 10:18). A Roman cross; that instrument of punishment had a severe jurisdiction, an unquestioned dominance, a fearsome authority. It was an instrument of fear; step out of line and this is what you get. Death; how much fear has death spawned? A bully, a tyrant; death's authority is severe. Death's authority is all around us. How many coffins have been built this year? I saw a bumper sticker the other day – all men are cremated equal. Cemeteries and morticians, funeral homes and hearses, flag draped caskets and 21 gun salutes; death's authority is all around us. I fight authority, authority always wins.

Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God (Matthew 27:40). It was a viscous taunt. No one comes down from the cross. Death is your master, bub. What can you do now, hot shot? The cross has you in its grip and the cross never lets go. You fought authority and authority always wins. Jesus knew the enemy that He had come to confront. God knows what death is. God knows how to disarm death. The Lord Christ has the authority to disarm it. By taking your sin, by dying in your place, by allowing death to consume Him – Christ's authority is unleashed. Mary didn't know. Mary couldn't grasp it. Her heart was broken. She did what love does for the deceased. Mary took spices to Jesus' tomb. She took ointment to anoint His corpse as a gesture of love, a gesture of fidelity. Death's seemingly boundless authority kept Mary's heart in darkness.

I suspect that you have known that darkness; I know I have. So often, we live as though we are under death's cruel control. Tell me that your problems don't sometimes consume you. To be sure, this world is broken. Pain is real. Heartache is real. We want solutions, don't we? Constructive solutions; we are to use our energy, our ingenuity, our corporate determination to find solutions to life's difficulties. Do you believe that that will ever come, completely? No; in this world it won't come. But I, for one, do not subscribe to the defeatist notion that "I fight authority, authority always wins." As a people, we've been drained of the potential that is in us for one reason: we've lost sight of the resurrection. Life is our ultimate authority. Easter is the Day that leads us to stand on the Mount of Life. Jesus fought death. He had the authority to lay down His life and it was so. Christ's life was beautifully sacrificed. Your sin was borne away into His death. Life and death contended then, there. The victory remained with life; the reign of death was ended. Life has more authority, divine authority. Christ's holiness was the instrument of life. Holy God cannot be held by death. Jesus is risen and that is the reality in which you live and move and have your being. In this life, resurrection is the dominant reality.

ALS is defeated; Alzheimer's is defeated; cancer and MS and muscular dystrophy and degenerative disk disease and congestive heart failure – Christ fought death and all of death's besties were vanquished. In this world you will have trouble, but that is a temporal affliction, short-term, no lasting effect. Jesus said these words: "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). The Resurrected Lord spoke to Mary, called her by name. What happened to her broken heart? What happened to her darkness? Weeping may remain for a night but rejoicing comes in the morning. Now Mary knew what kind of authority Jesus had – He is the victor over death. He rules by a power that cannot be defeated. It is not omnipotence that saves you, dear believer. It is grace and Christ's holiness and a grave shattering resurrection. Resurrection is not a theological abstraction. Resurrection is how things are in this world. Jesus' resurrected body is authority and He puts that authority in you. Man can't seize life from God; God gives it to you as a gift. Why in the world would we rebel against the authority of Christ's love, the authority of Easter, the authority of life? His authority prevails and we are blessed. Jesus lives, the victory's won. You are a child of Easter.