

Easter 2024
Exodus 15:1-11
1 Corinthians 5:6b-8
John 20:1-18

As a kid, my family didn't go out to eat much. Mom was a good cook and the little town of Albany, OR wasn't awash in culinary options. Plus, it was a different time. Restaurants now populate the boulevard of every town. Back then, people ate at home. In 1971, Sizzler was our option. 1971 Sizzler was the real deal. I remember two things distinctly from the early seventies, Albany, OR, the Sizzler and the family going out to dinner. The first thing was my old man telling me that I better eat everything on my plate because the food wasn't free. The second thing is me asking myself, "What's that green stuff on my plate?" "What the heck is that weird looking green stuff doing next to my Malibu Chicken?" It wasn't a vegetable. Even as a kid, I was down for vegetables. My mom told me not to eat it. So, of course, what did I do? That was my first encounter with parsley. It's what they call a "garnish." Well, this plate is pretty monochromatic. What should we do to liven it up a bit? Let's put a sprig of neon green, inedible parsley on it.

Do you know what we celebrate today? We celebrate how the world was changed. We celebrate life being triumphant over death. We celebrate the most momentous thing that you will ever know. The Son of God, who was horribly slaughtered on a Roman cross and laid in a dark, foreign, and foreboding tomb, came striding out of death, out of His grave and brings grace, eternal life, and heaven to the human race. Will you ever know any adversary as fearsome as death? No; you won't. And death is defeated by the Risen Christ. Easter changes the terms of what it is to be human, what it is to live in this broken creation, what it is to face death. A seven-year-old child, stricken with leukemia, can brazenly stare death in the face and say, "You cannot harm me. My Lord has defeated you and my dying is the gate to heaven, my dying is the gate to eternal life, and the immediate presence of God Himself." What else in the entire world gives you that kind of power? And people treat it like a garnish on a dull plate. Honestly, people treat the resurrection of Jesus Christ like it's just some religious parsley meant to liven up a monochromatic morning.

When resurrection is marveled at just one day out of the year then resurrection is merely a garnish. When Easter Egg Hunts are more important than the crucified Savior clobbering death by walking out of His tomb then resurrection is treated like parsley on your plate. When a church service looks like the sophomoric twaddle that is all around our culture then even churchmen are treating the resurrection like a garnish. If I asked you "What do you belong to" what would be the first thing out of your mouth? How many cards are in your wallet, cards that show what you belong to? Sam's Club, Redlands Public Library, the ACLU or the NRA (those two are great friends)? I've got an expired USTA card in my wallet (United States Tennis Association). LifeStream and VA and Liberty Dental Plan – do those cards tell me what I belong to? What do you suppose it means to belong to a church, a congregation?

You know what a church is? A church is a group of people who know that they belong to the resurrection. This Divine Service is the resurrection's home. You are here because you know that Jesus rising from the dead envelops your soul and changes your destiny. God has made sure

that you belong to Jesus and His death. God has made sure that you belong to His Son and His resurrection. Christ the King Lutheran Church is a faith-society and the most defining thing about this faith-society is that we belong to the resurrection. When you make the sign of the cross you are saying that you belong to the resurrection. When you commune at this altar you are saying that you belong to the resurrection. When you put your offering in the plate, that's what you're saying: "I belong to the resurrection and all my temporal gifts come from the one who died and rose again."

Temporal gifts; we're infatuated with them. God knows that you need them. He opens up His hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing (Psalm 145:16). He cares for the birds of the air; how much more does He care for you, giving you all that you need for this body and life (Matthew 6:25-33)? But God was tracking bigger game than temporal gifts when He sent His Son – conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary (John 12:31-33). Sin and death are titans. Sin and death and Satan are a pack of wolves that've gorged themselves on man's meat (1 Peter 5:8). The Son of God was made man because only He, only in this way, could God defeat what stood against us. Vulnerable; Almighty God became vulnerable to ensure that you belonged to the resurrection. Vulnerable to attack; vulnerable to scorn and ridicule and suffering and death; God ventured into our flesh because He wanted to win, win big, win everything, win back what He created in His image (Genesis 1:26). The price required for winning is bigger than you acknowledge. The payout given for winning is bigger than you appreciate. Me too; I sin too much because I fail to see the fearsome price Christ paid. I am sullen too much because I fail to see the wondrous payout of Jesus' death and resurrection.

My spiritual failures don't stop God from saving me. He's serious about the resurrection and He's serious about all of us. We belong to Him. Christ's blood was the instrument of victory. Jesus' righteousness and His shed blood eviscerated the wolves and consigned them to oblivion. The remedy for humanity's tragic loss of life and holiness and alliance with God was for the Father to send the Son and for the Son to bear our sin and die and be buried. In all this, God was in pursuit of you. Because men have distorted Christian doctrine we have been subject to things like the selling of indulgences. The church in the 16th century literally thought that it was a good idea to sell people forgiveness. It's laughable. How could we have fallen for that? Perhaps it was because the Bible was a garnish, mere parsley on the plate of Roman Catholicism. Human malevolence alienates us from God. That is sin. And Christ died for sinners; you and me. Christ died not for the good but for the bad. And because of that death, and only because of that death, we belong to God.

Our sin has been remedied. Christ shares His holiness with us. Risen! God received Christ's sacrifice and our sins have been taken away. We shall not die, but live. There is no light between this Divine Service and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The two are bonded in a divine structure of event and delivery. Christian men and women, and, yes, Christian children, have died courageously for one reason: The Tomb is Empty. All of the apostles, save one, gave their lives into martyrdom because they saw the glorified Savior after He was raised from the dead. You walk by faith not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). The eyes of your heart have been enlightened to see the power and the majesty and beauty of the King on His cross – even as the eyes in one's head see only weakness and shame and humiliation (Ephesians 1:18 versus 1 Corinthians 2:14). We see more. We see what the Scripture shows us (John 20:30-31). To be

sure, life is often difficult (Acts 14:22), but the Scripture consoles us, the resurrection emboldens us, this Divine Service renders all of Christ's life accessible, present. You are here because you belong to the resurrection. It is not a mere garnish to life. The resurrection is life itself.

We are here not to hearken to a cold lecture about a distant subject matter (Romans 1:16-17). This Divine Service is a happening, an event, a saving ministry that is provided by the risen King of kings (Matthew 20:28). He is here to give us what is His (Luke 22:27). The resurrection is His. Heaven is His. The resurrection will outlive this world (Matthew 24:35). You will outlive this world because you belong to the resurrection. Whatever difficulty you go through in this life is not worth comparing to the glory that shall be revealed to you (Romans 8:18). God's radiant presence awaits you. Heaven is your future. You belong to the resurrection. The food of the resurrection is what you eat this day. It is free but the price was high. Eat it knowing who paid the price. Eat it knowing that you belong to Him. Holy Communion is no mere garnish. Holy Communion is Easter coming into your body.