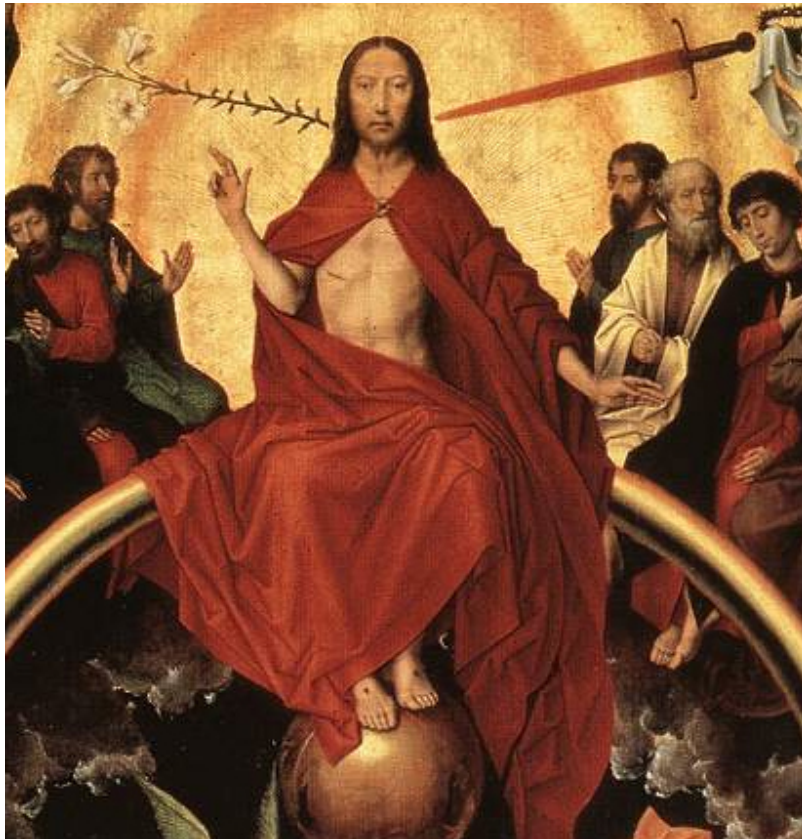


# The Good News of Jesus Our Judge (An Easter Sermon)



Cropped portion of Centre panel from Memling's triptych Last Judgment (c. 1467–1471) found on [Wikipedia](#)

**Co-missioners,**

For the purposes of Thursday Theology, today's topic is best addressed in essay form. As it is, we deliver it via yet another sermon, this one preached at an Easter Festival service three years ago. It's not a standard Easter sermon. Hence our daring to trouble you with it. You'll find little if any reference to an Easter account from one of the Gospels. Likewise missing is any straightforward attention to the issues of death and

resurrection that tend to predominate on Easter morning. Instead, the textual focus is on Peter's address to Cornelius and his household in Acts 10; and even there the homiletical focus slides to an observation that we suspect is commonly treated as peripheral, or odd, or even jarringly out of synch, a fly of sorts in what ought to be the Easter ointment of unalloyed delight. (But check the text. Notice how this fly, for Peter, is the chief Easter point.)

All of which is to say that sermon might indeed be of interest; and if it should leave you with a fresh thought or two about how massively encompassing the Easter Gospel is, then thanks be to God.

While you're at it, you might also want to scan [some clippings from Luther's Easter sermons](#). Ed Schroeder pulled them together many years ago. Luther being Luther, you're sure to be nourished there.

Peace and Joy,  
The Crossings Community

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**The Good News of Jesus Our Judge**  
**A Sermon on [Acts 10:34-43](#)**  
**Supplementary Text: [Isaiah 65:17-25](#)**  
by Jerome Burce  
Easter, 2019

Christ is risen!  
*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

When we are done here this Easter morning, nothing but nothing would please God more than to see us, each and every one,

walking out the doors we came through those doors when we are done with our backs as straight as we can make them, our heads as high as we can lift them, our hearts singing, our eyes shining, as big a bounce in our step as our legs and feet will allow.

Nothing would please God more tomorrow morning, or a month from now, than to see the joy of Easter Day still spilling out of you to the great surprise of the people you spend your days with. A few will find that refreshing. More of them, I think, will call it annoying. They'll wonder, perhaps, what's wrong with you, that you can't and won't be grumpy like everyone else. As for God, God will clap God's everlasting hands to find you so wonderfully out of synch with the mood of the world.

The mood of the world in 2019: it is not a pretty thing, is it. Some people are scared. Some people are angry. Some are greedy and self-absorbed, so careless of others. Americans are yelling a lot this year, mostly at each other. So many are taken with the game of tearing others down. Our children see this on their social media feeds and are quietly afraid, I think. Their parents see it too and spend their days on tiptoes.

We all woke up this April morning breathing air that reeks of judgment. There's nothing new about this. It's been in the air ever since the first man and the first woman took it upon themselves to judge each other, and to judge God too. That's what that story about the tree in the garden is all about. These days there are seven billion Eves and Adams on earth. All of them are doing what Eves and Adams have always done—they can't help but do it. So they poke, they snipe, they evaluate, they opinionate. Now and then they approve—they hit the "Like" button, as we've come recently to say it. More often they disapprove, or they just plain ignore, which, as it happens, is a way of passing a message to another human being that he or she

counts for so little that she may as well be dead. Lots and lots of people direct this message at God too.

In any case, all this is what judgment is about. And with all these billions of judges now packed under a single global sky at the same time it's no wonder the air stinks of judgment this year. No wonder too that we spend our days on edge, or that the children are afraid. Who can blame them? Certain strains of judgment are poisonous. You breathe too much of them, and it sickens you, and finally it kills you; and even little children are able in some way to sense that this is so.

So on this Easter Day the prophets and apostles of God Almighty, speaking through the Bible, have some very good news to tell our children. They're here to underscore it too with parents and grandparents. And to parents in particular they hand along the job of making sure your children hear this over and over and over again as they grow up.

We got this news most clearly just now from the apostle Peter when we caught him talking in the book of Acts to a little group of people who haven't heard of Jesus before. There are lots of people like this in our own country today.

So I hope you noticed how Peter starts with the thumbnail version of Jesus' story: who he was, what he did, how he died, how God this raised this Jesus from the dead in the great event we celebrate today. How this resurrection of a dead human being was the genuine article, the real deal, the exact opposite of the fake news that lots of sniffy people even then were judging it to be. No, says Peter. With our own eyes we saw him. We ate, we drank with him *after* he rose from the dead.

And when we did that, Peter says, he gave us an order. He commanded us to spread a message, a very particular message—a message, as it happens, that people will badly need to hear when

the year 2019 rolls around:

Tell them, Jesus says, that *I* am the one appointed by God to judge the living and the dead. (I'm quoting Peter here.)



Washing of the Feet by Capella dei Scrovegni  
found on [Wikipedia](#)

Tell them, Jesus says, that I have the last word on who they are and what their future will be.

Tell them, Jesus says, that the only opinion that finally counts for anything in the end is my opinion, no one else's.

Tell them in America today that my judgment on them or on anybody else is the only judgment that God Almighty will back to the hilt without batting an eye. Why is that? Because God the

Father respects the judgment of God's only Son. He respects it so much that he raised this Son from the dead to keep on judging as he had been judging, in a way that other judges called dead wrong, or even insane.

Really, those other judges said, you can't let seriously bad people off the hook instead of making them pay, you just can't. God doesn't allow it, they said.

Really, you can't let women leave their homes and families to run around with you as if that's OK—with us it isn't done, those other judges said back then.

Really, they said, you can't be treating poor people like rich people or rich people like poor people. That too just isn't done. Even now in our American day it isn't done. You may have noticed.

You can't touch lepers, they said back then. You can't hang out with Samaritans either. These days, Jesus, you can't be letting gay people cozy up to you, or homophobes, for that matter—some current judges say that. They also say that you can't be friends with those ignorant or wicked people who keep voting the wrong way every time an election rolls around.

Above all, Jesus, you can't run around pretending to know more about God and the way things finally work with God than the experts do. That's the bottom line of what those other judges said back then—as if they knew what is in God's heart.

And when Jesus, exercising his judgment, kept doing what they said he couldn't do, they had him executed. And in the crowd that day stood all those run-of-the-mill mini-judges of the kind who these days post their vicious anonymous comments on newspaper websites. "Crucify him," they said. "Get rid of him. This man is wrong. This man is bad news." That's how all those



other judges saw it, the big ones and the little ones too. That's why they killed Jesus.

Don't think for a moment that we wouldn't kill him today, with lots of folks who call themselves Christian in the vanguard of the execution party.

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So in those first wee hours of Easter Sunday morning, guess whose judgment God backed up when the grave blew open and out Jesus walked to live and reign forever at God's right hand?

That's what we're here *this* Easter morning to celebrate, and I do mean celebrate.

Everybody here this morning is a person that Jesus Christ has already made a judgment about. For almost all of us it happened openly and plainly, as a matter of public record, when we were baptized.

You are a person of infinite and everlasting worth to God Almighty.

I say it again: you are a person of infinite and everlasting worth to God Almighty.

This is the judgment of Jesus Christ on you. Each of you. For proof he can show you the holes in his hands, his feet, his side. He can give you his body to eat, his blood to drink.

Every person here is one of those people who belongs in the future God promised to make in this morning's first reading. "I will create Jerusalem a joy," God says, "its people as a delight." Parents, I can't encourage you enough to take your bulletin along and read this passage again with your children tonight before they go to bed. And talk about it with them—this

wondrous time to come when nothing hurts or destroys and no children are crying. Tell your children that's where they belong, where God is taking them. And be sure to tell them Jesus said so, Jesus our Judge who is alive and with us this Easter night to make this happen for these children he treasures.

As for you, the parents, the grandparents, the grownup brothers, sisters, and cousins, the family friends and neighbors to all these children: each of you is a person who can't be taken down by all those other judgments and opinions that will be flying at you first thing tomorrow morning. Fly they will. They're in the air. You can't escape them. They're in the air you have to breathe. Some of these judgments you will like. Many more you will hate. Some you'll deserve. Others will be unfair, even grossly unfair. As always, you'll be walking through the day with certain things you keep tucked away deep inside and hidden from view. You have a pretty good idea how swift and harsh the judgment would be if such things came to light. That's especially so in our present caustic moment in America when you're either with me or against me, either all good or all evil, no in-between—and no one seems to value mercy much, at least not in public.

Please, dear sons and daughters of God in Jesus Christ: do not let this dismay you. Don't allow it to suck you in either, or when it does, apologize to your Lord. Count on his love, his mercy, his forgiveness. These things are his specialty, and he aches to bathe you in them.

And then remember that you are in the world these days as Christ's Easter witnesses. That's how Peter would say it.

And there's another way of saying it too. This comes from St. Paul in the second chapter of Second Corinthians:

"Through us God in Christ is spreading the fragrance that comes



of knowing him. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.”

Think about that this Easter Day. Pray about it too as the coming weeks of Easter fly by.

We baptized Jesus-trusting people are designed to be God’s antidote to the stench of poisonous judgment the world is choking on this year.

When the Holy Spirit blows you through the doors at the end of this service, he is sending you home as a breath of fresh air for your friends and your neighbors, to say nothing of the people you share that home with. That’s God’s plan for you this Easter year.

God sends you there to live in the strength of what you heard this Easter morning.



Photo by [Sayak Bala](#) on [Unsplash](#)

He sends you there to channel the gracious, life-giving judgment of Jesus Christ, the verdict he pronounces not just on you but on any human creature who dares to hear his voice and to trust him.

They too are people of infinite and everlasting worth to God almighty. That's in the judgment of Jesus Christ, our risen Lord and Savior, who gave his life to back that judgment up and make it stick forever.

Remember this the next time you're on social media. Refresh your little world by showing them how weirdly kind you are.

Remember it the next time you see a picture of huddled refugees, or of people at a political rally you'd never dream of attending yourself.

Remember it the next time someone else's judgment knocks you for a loop. You lose a job. You get that awful letter from a school that says they won't admit you. Some other judge unfriends you or starts to ignore you.

Remember it the next time you're looking in a casket or standing at a dear one's grave. There lies a person of infinite worth, too precious for God to give up on. And for that person—for the remains of that person—God's promise still stands. Jesus says so. Remember that.

Remember every day that the body and blood of Christ is given and shed not just for you but for the life of the world. That's what Jesus says, and Jesus is the only judge whose opinion finally matters.

So flash the judgment of Jesus Christ in the way you spend your day. Let your risen Lord work in you and through you to sweeten the air of the world he lives to save. Refresh it this year with

peace and patience and hope and joy.

Christ is risen!

*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

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**Thursday Theology: that the benefits of Christ be put to use**  
A publication of the Crossings Community