

Tidbits from Luther's Easter Sermons

[From "Day by Day We Magnify Thee.
Daily Readings for the Church year Selected from
the Writings of Martin Luther."
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"Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting?
O grave, where is thy victory? . . . thanks be to God, which
giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1
Cor.15:54-57

This is a strange and unprecedented message, such as reason
cannot comprehend. It must be accepted in faith. The message is
that Christ is alive and yet died, and died in such a way that
in Him death itself has had to die, and lose all its power . . .

And as the Lord Christ has conquered death, He has also
conquered sin. For in His own Person He is pure and just; but
because He takes upon Himself the sins of others He becomes a
sinner. That is why sin can assault Him. And He, the Lord
Christ, is very ready to be thus assaulted and nailed to the
cross in order that He may die, as if He had Himself sinned and
brought His death upon Himself. But there, hidden under the sin
of others, His holiness is so great that death cannot overcome
Him. Thus sin, like death, attacked the wrong man, and so grew
weak and died in His body.

And likewise the devil wanted to prove his power over Christ,
and uses all his might against Him, trying to bring Him down.

But He meets with a higher power which he cannot overcome. And all this has been wrought in order that our Lord Christ might glory because by being cast down He was lifted up on high, and these three mighty foes, sin, the devil, and death, must lie low under His feet. This great victory we celebrate today. Now all power consists in this, that we take it well to heart and firmly believe in it.

– Sermon for Easter Day, 1544. W.A. 52.249f.

“And the angel answered and said unto the women: Fear not :. . . He is not here . . . he is risen . . .” Matt. 28:5-6

The dear angels preach very well, for they have good reason so to do. The substance of their preaching is this: You seek Jesus in the tomb. But He is become a different man. You believe that He was crucified, but we will tell you where He is now. ‘He is risen from the dead and is not here.’ You will not find him in this life. On earth, which is the realm of death, you must not seek Christ. Different eyes, fingers, or feet are needed to see Christ, to take hold of Him or to walk towards Him. I will show you (he says) the place where He lay, but He is no longer there. His name is now ‘He is not here,’ as St. Paul writes to the Colossians (3:1-3): ‘If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above’ . . .

Christ is Not Here. Hence a Christian must also be Not Here. Therefore no one can tie down Christ or a Christian with certain special rules. It says, ‘He is not here.’ He has left the husks down here, such as earthly justice, piety, wisdom, the Law, and whatever else belongs to earth; of all those He has stripped Himself entirely. You must not seek Him in the things which appear upon the earth. They are nothing but husks, and husks are never used a second time. Therefore, no one, in so far as he is

a Christian, can be caught in them, but, as Christ is above all things, so is a Christian above all things. Christ has in Himself overcome all things and left them behind. And in that we believe this, we too are called 'Not here,' even as He is. As St. Paul says, 'Set your affection not on things on the earth.' What a wonderful saying it is. Your life is hid, not in a chest, for there it might be found, but in Him who is Not Here. Our life shall be above all humn wisdom, justice, and piety. As long as you abide in yourself, you are not devout, which means that our life is hidden high above our eyes . . . and high above all that we can feel.

—Sermon from the year 1530, W.A.32.49f.

"Christ was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." Rom.4:25

When I look at my sins, they slay me. Therefore I must look upon Christ, who drew my sins upon Himself and has become a blessing. Now they lie no longer on my conscience but on Christ, and they seek to slay Him. Let us see, then, how they get on with Him. They cast Him down and kill Him. O, Lord God, where is now my Christ and my Redeemer? Then God comes and brings Christ forth and makes Him alive, and not only alive, but He sets Him in heaven and lets Him rule over all things. Now where is sin? It is on the gallows.

And when I hold on to this and believe it I have a joyful conscience, like Christ, for I am without sin. Now I dare death, the devil, sin, and hell to do me harm. Inasmuch as I am a descendant of Adam they can harm me; I must shortly die. But now that Christ has laid upon Himself my sin, and has died for it, and been slain for it, they can do me no harm, for Christ is too strong for them. They cannot hold Him. He breaks forth and

smites them to the ground, and ascends into heaven, binds and fetters sin and sorrow, and rules over them eternally. Therefore I have a good conscience, I am joyful and blessed, and fear those tyrants no longer, for Christ has taken my sin away from me and laid it on Himself. But they cannot remain on Him.

—On the fruit and power of the resurrection of Christ.
W.A.10.1(ii).221

“If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.” 1 Cor.15:17

Firmly believe that Christ has taken upon Himself your sin and death. For that is how the power of the resurrection is given to me and to you and to all mankind who believe in Christ. For if I do not make use of it in this way I do my Lord Christ great injustice, for I let His triumph and victory remain barren. It should not remain barren, for He wills that it shall bear great fruit, namely, that in all affliction, sin, and fear, I should see nothing but Christ triumphant rising from the dead.

Whoever can picture this victory in his heart is already saved. But whoever has no Good Friday and Easter Day has no good day in the year, that is, whoever does not believe that Jesus suffered and rose for him is without hope. For we are called Christians because we can look to Christ and say, Dear Lord, Thou hast taken upon Thee my sin and hast become Martin, Peter, and Paul, and hast trodden my sin underfoot and consumed it! There I look for my sin as Thou hast directed me. On Good Friday I still see my sin before my eyes, but on Easter Day a new man has been born. His hand has been made new and sin is seen no more. All this Thou hast given to me freely, and hast said that Thou hast overcome my devil, my sin, and my death.

–Sermon from the year 1530. W.A. 32.44

“Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.” John 20:19

What did the disciples fear? They feared death. Yes, they were in the midst of death. But whence came that fear of death? From sin; for if they had not sinned they would not have been afraid. Death could not have harmed them, for the sting of death, with which it slays, is sin. Yet they lacked, as we all lack, the right knowledge of God. For if they had known God to be God, they would have been confident and without fear. But one who does not believe in God must be afraid of death. Such a one can never have a glad and sure conscience.

Whenever a man in such fear cries unto God, God cannot refrain from helping him. Just as Christ did not stay long outside, away from His frightened disciples, but soon was there comforting them and saying: ‘Peace be unto you,’ ‘I am come, be of good cheer and fear not,’ so it is still. When we are afraid, God lifts us up and causes the Gospel to be preached to us, and thus restores to us a glad and sure conscience.

Where Christ is, yea, surely, the Father and the Holy Ghost surely come; then there is pure grace and no law; pure mercy and no sin; pure life and no death; pure heaven and no hell; and there I take comfort in the works of Christ, as if I had done them myself.

–Sermon for the first Sunday after Easter, 1526. W.A. 10.1(ii).234ff.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

1 Pet.1:3

How, or by what means has such rebirth come to pass? He says, Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; as if he would say, God the Father has begotten us again, not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible seed, that is, of the Word of truth, which is a power of God which re-creates and quickens and saves all who believe in it. What sort of a Word is that? It is the Word of Jesus Christ which is preached unto us, namely, that He died for your sin and for the sin of the whole world, and rose again on the third day, that through His resurrection He might win for us justification, life, and blessedness. Whoever believes in this message, namely, that Christ died and is risen for his sake, with him the resurrection has proved its power. He is reborn through it, which means that He is created anew after the image of God, He receives the Holy Ghost and knows the gracious will of God, and has such a heart, mind, courage, will, and thoughts as no hypocrite ever had or anyone who believes in salvation through his own works. For he knows that no works of the law and no righteousness of his own, but Christ alone in His suffering and resurrection, can make him just and blessed.

This is rightly called apostolic preaching.

–Exposition of 1 Peter. E.A. 52.11