

Sermon Notes for 5/22/16 (Holy Trinity)

Preached at Jehovah Lutheran – St. Paul, MN

Text: Acts 2:14a, 22-36

Theme: OUR HOPE RESTS ENTIRELY ON JESUS' RESURRECTION

The Point: Unlike the experience of the dead King David, the resurrection of Jesus places Him in a unique position to be both Lord and Messiah.

Introduction: David may have come out on top in his epic battle with the giant, Goliath of Gath. But he does not come out that well in Peter's Pentecost message, in which he in a sense puts David up against Jesus in the question of who will dominate the Christian message. Of course, it is not Peter's purpose to put David down. Not in the least! But his exaltation of Jesus is the main event of his preaching, and David cannot hold a candle to Jesus, by this measure. On this Trinity Sunday, we want to think about the fact that OUR HOPE RESTS ENTIRELY ON JESUS' RESURRECTION.

On Trinity Sunday we emphasize, more than at any other time in the church year, the fact that we believe in the Triune God. In a *Reader's Digest* article some years back, Ann Spivack related this story: "While our friends from India traveled around California on business, they left their 11-year-old daughter with us. Curious about my going to church one Sunday morning, she decided to come along. When we returned home, my husband asked her what she thought of the service. 'I don't understand why the West Coast isn't included too,' she replied. When we inquired what she meant, she added, 'You know, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the whole East Coast.'" East and West coasts alike are targets of the Good News of our Savior, who is sent by the Father and who is sending the Spirit to empower His people for life. And the resurrection of Jesus is the heart and core of the proclamation of that Good News.

Peter introduces King David in his Pentecost message (of which we heard only the opening paragraphs last week). David, an important prophet and the prototype king of Israel, spoke of seeing no corruption. Writing in Psalm 16, he spoke these significant words: "For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One experience corruption." Every soul that had ever died up to that point in human history had experienced corruption. And it is true of every person who has died since (with one exception). That is what happens when these bodies die. The life-generating processes of respiration and digestion and circulation and all the rest come to a halt. And when that takes place, decay and corruption set in quickly, so quickly in fact that many people groups (Jews included) practice burial within 24 hours of death. When Lazarus had been buried for four days, Martha protested to Jesus at the opening of his grave, "Lord, already there is a stench." Corruption is very real – and it is not pretty. The ugliness is real, the decay is real, the stench is real. That is what sin has worked in this world which God created for life and joy.

David wrote, "You will not. . . let your Holy One experience corruption." Yet David died and was buried (in a tomb that could still be identified at Jesus' day 1000 years later). David had seen corruption. His body decayed and has returned dust to dust. So who is the "Holy One" of whom David speaks? We know that it is Jesus. He is the only person who has ever died who did not experience the corruption of which David had written. God acted to keep Jesus' body from any decay. Jesus rose on the third day. He saw no corruption of His flesh. The flesh decays because of sin, and Jesus died with the weight of the world's sin lying on His bruised and beaten shoulders. But He saw no decay. As Peter put it, "God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power." Death may have raised its wail in Jesus' experience on Calvary, but it was not the last word. On the third day, His body came to life with power and vigor and never again to be subject to pain or suffering or dying.

This truth encourages us. We are still subject to death and is corruption. Unless Christ returns first, you will die and so will I. So will all your friends and family members, your neighbors and your enemies as

well. A dead body is already returning as dust to dust. No matter how skilled the funeral director and the hairdresser, nothing can change the reality that this body has lost its spark, its energy, its spirit, its life. No matter how many visitors to the funeral home may say, “How peaceful he looks” or “Doesn’t she look natural?” (I hope I don’t look good or natural after I am dead – that wouldn’t say much about how I looked while I was alive!), that body is still subject to corruption. But we know more than this corruption.

We also know the One who has overpowered death’s corruption. Jesus lives again – and because He lives, we also shall live. These bodies that lose their vigor so quickly, in which the decaying processes go to work so fast, in which the corruption works overtime – these very bodies will one day be raised to live with our Lord forever. And the guarantee of this is that our Lord Himself lives.

Nothing else in the history of the world has put the stake in the ground regarding life and death so firmly as has the resurrection of Jesus. This event is the turning point of all history. It is certainly the key teaching of the Christian Church. Yes, I know that justification by grace through faith is the article of faith on which the church stands or falls. But unless Christ is raised from the grave, there is no justification, no forgiveness, no salvation for us. Unless Christ is raised, His crucifixion is merely a horrible tragedy, baptism is an empty symbol, and the Lord’s Supper offers us nothing but the taste of a corpse.

A key question for us is this: How can you and I be so sure that Christ is risen? Well, there are several things that we can point to in making this statement confidently. First of all, Jesus Himself predicted His resurrection. If Jesus did not rise from death, He is a liar, and His word cannot be trusted. Several times during the weeks prior to the crucifixion, He directly told the disciples that the Son of Man had to suffer, be crucified, and on the third day come back from the grave. Of course, they did not “get it” and were the most shocked of anyone that Jesus was alive again. According to Peter’s words in the Pentecost sermon, the Old Testament had also prophesied the Messiah’s resurrection. It was no surprise to the Holy Spirit.

Besides this, the empty tomb and the abandoned grave clothes also testify to our Lord’s resurrection. The one thing that would have satisfied the enemies of Christ that He was still dead would have been to produce a corpse. But that body could not be found. The silence of the enemies of the cross might be more eloquent than all the defenses that the Church could produce. The only “body of Christ” that is presented to the world is the Church, which serves as Christ’s arms and legs, as His hands and feet in this world. But the physical body of Christ lives, as the witnesses saw it.

And here is another important point: Many, many people saw the risen Lord. If He had appeared only to the disciples in the upper room, we might be a little suspicious that perhaps they were just imagining things or spinning tales. But He appeared in the garden to Mary Magdalene, on the road with the Emmaus disciples, at the seashore, indoors, outdoors, all around the town. He even appeared (so Paul tells us) to over 500 of the believers at one time – probably at some worship time the Church was observing? Anyone from the area of Jerusalem who wondered what all the hubbub was about regarding Jesus could talk with the eyewitnesses who had actually seen Him, heard Him, eaten with Him, and even put their fingers into the nail and spear holes in His risen, physical body.

Then there is the historical reality we have to deal with. Something dramatic happened to transform this cowardly, ashamed group of disciples into bold, courageous, daring witnesses for Jesus. Examine their sermons in the book of Acts, and you will find the risen Christ in the center of all of them. Their boldness came from their absolute conviction that Jesus was alive and that He planned to return in glory to take His own to be with Him where He is. In fact, the astounding growth of the church is testimony to the fact of something unprecedented. The conviction of the disciple community that they served a living Savior empowered them. Nothing else that has any historical reality explains the explosive growth of this little unheralded, unsupported, alienated group.

Then too, we can look at our own lives and realize that God has transformed us personally. This is powerful testimony to a living Lord. Your confidence in the midst of trials, your willingness to bear suffering in patience and hope, your determination to live for Jesus whatever it demands of you – these are all strong and convincing testimonies to the reality of a living and active Savior.

Peter is not done with the comparison between Jesus and David yet. David did not experience ascending into the heavens. But his words, “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand’” apply perfectly to Jesus’ experience, for He is exalted at the right hand of God and rules over all things from that position. David may have held supreme power as king over the territory of Israel in the 10th century B.C. But Jesus holds supreme power over all things, all nations, all powers, natural and supernatural, by virtue of His resurrection and ascension, and His rule will never end. On the fortieth day after He rose from death, the disciples watched Him ascend into the sky as He promised them that He would return to claim them for His kingdom. Such an event breeds confidence in those who know Jesus as the risen and reigning King. Nothing is outside His influence – and He promises to rule over all things for the sake of His people. We don’t need to fret about today or tomorrow, for we serve a living Lord and King.

Connie Mack, one of the greatest managers in the history of baseball, related one of his secrets of good management: he didn’t worry. “I discovered,” he explained, “that worry was threatening to wreck my career. I saw how foolish it was and I forced myself to get so busy preparing to win games that I had no time left to worry over the ones that were already lost. You can’t grind grain with water that has already gone down the creek.” How true that is! And how it encourages us to live free from worry, fear and doubt as we live to announce and enact the presence of Christ’s kingdom in this place. The past has been forgiven, and the risen Lord is our assurance of that. Today we live for Him without fear or anxiety.

Jesus has a remarkable and unique position as the Son of God, God in human flesh. His place as the Son of God is highlighted in Peter’s message. “Having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he [Jesus] has poured out this that you both see and hear.” What a powerful picture of the cooperative efforts of Father, Son and Holy Spirit! On this Trinity Sunday, it is fitting that we celebrate and praise the unique character and being of our Triune God, who works for our salvation. And nowhere is His activity more powerfully displayed than in the resurrection of Jesus.

Some scholars estimate that over three hundred New Testament verses deal directly with the subject of Jesus’ resurrection. Christ’s victory over death is called a sign for unbelievers and an answer to the doubt of believers. It assures us that Jesus’ teaching is true and reliable. Paul calls it “of first importance,” along with Christ’s death and burial – and His many appearances to eyewitnesses. The resurrection impels our witness and evangelism. It gives us power to live as God’s children and calls us to total commitment to the Lord who has rescued us so dramatically. Because Christ is alive, we do not need to fear death or the grave, for He will raise us from death on the Last Day. Because He lives, we have power through our connection to Him in baptism. Because He lives, He conveys His forgiveness through the means of bread and wine shared under His blessing, means that convey His very body and blood.

Conclusion: Unlike the experience of the dead King David, the resurrection of Jesus places Him in a unique position to be both Lord and Messiah. David is dead and buried. The pharaohs, those Egyptian kings who built such magnificent tombs for themselves in the pyramids, are all dead and buried. Moses is dead and buried. Mohammed is dead and buried. The Buddha is dead and buried. Mormon leader Joseph Smith is dead and buried, as is every other religious leader and prophet. Jesus, however, though He died fully and completely, now lives. He has conquered death as the assurance that death will not have the last word in your life or in mine. Paul puts it plainly, “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. . . But in fact Christ has been

raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.” And this is the ground of our hope now and always, in Jesus’ powerful and saving name, AMEN!