

The Resurrection of Christ and Its Meaning

[From Martin Luther, preaching on Easter Sunday Morning, March 28, 1529]

You have heard in the Passion how Christ let himself be crucified and buried and how sin and death trampled him underfoot. Satan and the sins of the world lie on him in the tomb. Sin, death and the devil are his lord. Therefore you must look into his tomb and realize that my sins and my death tear him apart and oppress him. There the devil regards himself as secure, and the chief priests boast and rejoice: He is gone and will not return. But in the instant when they believe him destroyed, the Lion tears himself away from sin, death, hell, and the jaws of the devil and rips them to shreds with his teeth. This is our comfort, that Christ comes forth: Death, sin, and the devil cannot hold him. The sin of the entire world is powerless. When he appears to Mary Magdalene, one sees in him neither death nor sin nor sadness but sheer life and joy. There I see that the Lord is mine and treads on the devil. Then I find my sins, torment, and devil where I ought to find them. There is the seed of the woman, who has struck the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15), and says: Death, you shall die; Hell, you shall be defeated! Here is the victor.

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When the sins lie on Christ, then I see what the world, the devil, and sin do to him in the grave and in death: they hang on him and crush him; thus they are strong and devour him. But because today he now comes forth from the grave and remains in honor and glory, everything that the devil, sin, and death have done is destroyed. It is easy to say such words, but still no one believes it. It is truly a difficult article to believe, to stand with certainty on what I say, that all sins that I feel are not mine, that the fear of death is not mine. This is said contrary to all reason. But Scriptures certainly does not lie when it says that my sins lie on him. If this is true then they do not lie on me. Thus I must follow the logic of these utterances and say: I know nothing of sin, death, or the devil, for I look upon Christ. If they have not strangled him, then they must be dead. For when sin and death were capable of something, then I would expect to detect in in Christ. But they do nothing to him. He lives, I see no marks on him. For this reason they must be blown away like dust by the wind. Therefore a Christian ought to feel nothing of sin and death but look only upon Christ. Whoever can believe this article is a Christian.

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When an evil conscience and fear plagues Christians, then they say: This does not matter to me for I have no sins; Christ has them all. I see them there. He took them on himself on the cross and buried them. But now he lives and is risen. Indeed I have sins and good works, but I do not look at them: I look upon Christ alone. IF they teach us that we become righteous through our works, they tear this picture from our hearts and slander Christ. And yet it is ture: I am a sinner, and I am not a sinner. But they say: I only want to have good works. But if I didn't confess to being a sinner, I would not have Christ and would not be in need of him because I refused to be a sinner. For this reason, if I won't be a sinner, then I am one; and conversely, if I am in myself a condemned sinner but go outside myself and into Christ, then I am not one.

Christians from their own standpoint are a Judas, a Caiaphas, a Pilate and find themselves condemned. But there is another Person who took my sins on himself. On Good Friday they are

all laid around his neck. But on Easter I also look at him, and then he has none. He has commanded that I look at my sins not on me, but on Christ. Whoever can do this has recovered from the snakes' bite [John 3:15] and looks at Christ rightly; for where there is no sin there is righteousness and life.

Thus sin is completely taken away in the resurrection. Everyone should learn this today, that all of us should abandon thoughts about ourselves and should not pass judgment on ourselves according to our feelings. For this is contrary to Christ and the Gospel, which says Christ has taken away the sin from our hearts and consciences and laid them on himself. For this reason the apostles praise the resurrection increasingly. We should also do it because the flesh is too evil, Satan too powerful, and the conscience too slow for us to learn to look at Christ and not ourselves.

(The 1529 Holy Week and Easter Sermons of Dr Martin Luther, Concordia Academic Press, 1999, pages 124-127)