

Pastor:

He is risen.

Congregation:

He is risen-

Pastor:

Hallelujah. Amen and amen. What a glorious day it is to be in the House of the Lord. It was rather a different feeling in the church on Friday night. The altar was bare, everything was bare, nothing on the walls. The only thing that was there was the cross and Christ on the cross. And at the end of the evening, we shut down all the lights to remind us of the darkness. But even though we exited the congregation in silence, reflecting upon the death of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, it was not as if we were going to mourn. We were somber. We were reminded that Christ needed to die to forgive our sins because we had rebelled against Him in thought, word and deed. We were reminded of the sin and the rebellion and the disconnect that we have with God. We were reminded of all of that, but we were also reminded that that was the very purpose for Him to come. That was the very reason He was born. In fact, I say to you today, Merry Christmas.

Congregation:

Merry Christmas.

Pastor:

Merry Christmas. Seriously, this is your Christmas gift. This is the point of why we celebrate Christmas that He was born so that He might come and die and rise from the dead so that we might be reassured that when we die, so also will we live with Christ, if we believe in Him, if we trust in Him for our hope and our salvation. The one thing that the Old Testament tells us throughout the whole history is that even with God absolutely present with the Israelites, even with the Law of God laid out so clearly before them, right directly from God's own hand, the Israelites could not live up to the standard of God. I mean, listen to these people. They've just experienced the 10 plagues in Egypt. The final one being the death of the firstborn in all of Egypt, except for them, because they had the blood covering them. And they saw all of this. And Moses is leading them out of Egypt, and then the Egyptians finally say, "You know what? Wait a second. Why are we getting rid of our slaves? We need to get them back."

So they got chasing after the Israelites. And the Israelites, at the first sign of trouble, what did they do? They grumble and they complain to God Himself. They're going to Moses and say, "Moses, why did you bring us out here? What? Were there not enough graves in Egypt? Didn't we tell you this when we were in Egypt? It would be better for us to stay there and serve the Egyptians than to go out to die." And that really is the attitude of all of humanity. It is better for us to conform to the world to do what the world expects of us rather than face persecution or ridicule or death. That is the temptation of mankind. That is why it is very tempting for churches and people to deny their Lord, to conform the teaching of God to match the culture, to water down the message, to not be so clear that, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," and deserve nothing but the wrath of God.

That's not a message anybody wants to hear. The world says, "You know what? It's better for us to stay away from here because we don't want to hear that. We don't want to die." The problem is without Christ, we will die. And when we die without Christ, that is eternal. And so even though the people saw the work of God, they were still inclined to doubt. And it is quite, frankly, the same for us today. Whenever a hardship comes our way, whenever a problem happens, whenever things don't go quite the way we expect or want, what's the first thing we do? Ideally, the first thing we do is go to the Lord and say, "God, please guide and direct us. Help us to understand what is going on. Help us to find joy in this suffering and struggle and let us trust you." That's ideally what we should say. More than likely, what we actually say is, "Why me? This is not fair. I don't like this."

But we are reminded again that we are to hold fast to the Word of God and His promises. And that is the only thing that will carry us through. And if we hold fast to the promise of God, it will not be in vain. When we hold fast to the Word of God, we will respond like Mary at the tomb. At first, she saw the tomb empty. She even saw the angels and she was still weeping because she did not fully understand what was going on. Even seeing Jesus, she didn't quite recognize Him, until she heard His voice. Until she heard His Word given to her and His Word was to call her by name. See, that is the beauty of the resurrection. In the resurrection, God can come to us and call us by name. And when He calls us by name, we are not afraid.

You notice after the Egyptians finally saw the glory of God as they passed through the Red Sea and the waters protect them and save them. As they pass through the waters, they finally look back and they fear God because they see the destruction of the Egyptian army and they see their salvation and they feared God and they believed in Him. This is why Luther says, "You should have no other gods before

me." What does this mean? We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things. The fear of God sounds really weird to celebrate, but think about this. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and the wages of sin is death." If we do not fear that word, if we do not fear the wrath of God because we have sinned, we're not going to understand the need that we have for our savior. We'll go blissfully ignorant throughout the world thinking we're good. Hopefully I do more good than evil and God will accept that.

But the Word of God says, "No, there's not enough good that you can do, but I have called you by name through the waters that have saved you." Not the Red Sea waters, but the waters of baptism, in which God named you, put His name and then put His name upon you. He called you by name. He called you His child in baptism and you are His own. And so I encourage each and every one of you, as you go through this life and as you look at the hardships that you face, remember God calls you by name, knows you, loves you and has forgiven you.

Now we have Christ on the cross all year long, but He didn't stay on the cross. He went into the tomb and He raised again on the third day. But Christ is still on the cross to remind us that there is our salvation. Christ died. The whole point of his birth was His death. So why do we celebrate Easter? Because Easter is proof that God accepted the sacrifice. Easter tells us that what he did on the cross did what He said it was going to do. It forgave our sins and therefore we have hope. In the cross, we still preach Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sins. And the proof that He was crucified for our forgiveness is the resurrection. And so because He rose from the dead, we are confident that His sacrifice was sufficient for us. And that is why we rejoice.

I don't know if you remember the comic strip BC, and they do always do a good thing around Easter. And the guy was sitting back looking out into the wasteland. And he said, "I don't like calling it Good Friday."

He said, "Why?"

"Because my savior died on that day. It doesn't feel good."

And the other guy said, "Well, what would happen if you were scheduled to die on the cross and He came and took your place? How would you feel?"

And he said, "Good."

"There you go." There you go. Good. He took our place. That is why we call it Good Friday. And that is why we celebrate this Easter morning because He took our place. And we don't need to doubt because He knows our name. We don't have to question, did He take my place? Am I included in that? Paul makes it very clear that he preaches the gospel that he received to all nations. All nations are part of

the salvation of God. All nations desire and need to hear the Word of God. And it is our opportunity and pleasure and joy to proclaim that message, to preach what we have received. Not just me as a preacher, but you as an individual to everybody that you come in contact with. You don't preach as in beat them over the head with the Bible, but you rejoice. I have been saved. I know my savior. My sins are forgiven. I have hope.

And that is what the world needs to hear. Christianity is not about a list of dos and don'ts. Christianity is not about we're better than they are and we've got it figured out and they don't. That's not what Christianity is about. Christianity is about this. We poor miserable sinners have found the solution, have found the hope, have found the promise, and it is in Christ and He has done it all for us. He has risen from the dead. He is alive and He promises that He will call each and every one of us by name to bring us to be with Him. You notice what He says to Mary. When she cries out Rabboni, she grabs onto Him and He says, "Do not cling to me for I have not yet ascended to the Father."

We cling to Christ, but ultimately we don't try and keep Him here because we're really waiting for the new heavens and the new earth where we can cling to Him for all eternity. That's his point. He doesn't want us to cling to Him here and hold Him here and try and conform Him to our desires. He wants us to conform to His desires. He wants us to put our trust in Him, not just for the day to day of this world, but for the confidence of the time to come, the confidence that on the day, on the last day, our last day or the last day, either way, whichever comes first, on our last day, on our last breath, we might cling to the Lord and rejoice that He is taking us home.

He has risen from the dead, He will ascend into the heavens and He sits there at the right hand coming to judge the living and the dead. He has judged us and He continues to judge us. But His judgment upon us is not guilty. You are free because I have risen from the dead. He is risen.

Congregation:

He is risen!

Pastor:

Amen and amen. We confess the faith that God has given to us in the words of the Nicene Creed 1:58. Please rise.