

Mark 16:1–8
Easter Sunday
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
April 9, 2023

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

Many people think of Easter as little more than a quaint spring festival with Easter dinner (or brunch), pictures of bunnies and eggs, soothing pastel colors, and candy. Sometimes even in the Christian Church, Easter is reduced to a celebration of winter's end. We have pictures in nature of what is seemingly dead rising again to new life all over the fields and forests. In Germany, Easter means it's time to switch from your winter tires to your summer tires, which brings about excitement of travels ahead. But if Easter is nothing more than the movement of one season to the next, then there's no difference between Christianity and any other religion in this world, worshiping the creature rather than the creator. We praise God for His glorious creation, which gives us pictures of resurrection and new life. But this morning we focus on the Resurrection of our Lord, that first Easter Sunday, as the victorious conquest of Jesus over sin, death, and the Devil.

Scripture often describes what our LORD does as victory in battle. In the Old Testament, God is often called "The Lord of Hosts," that is, "The Lord of the armies." The LORD Himself fights for His people, as we see in many Old Testament accounts. When the LORD led His people out of slavery in Egypt, Moses said to the people: "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will work for you today . . . The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent" (Ex 14:13–14). Near Jericho, Joshua looked up and saw a man with a drawn sword, the commander of the army of the LORD. Joshua fell on his face and worshiped

the commander of the LORD's army, because the commander of the LORD's army is the LORD God Himself, our Lord Jesus Christ (Joshua 5:14). The Prophet Isaiah says: "The LORD goes out like a mighty man, like a man of war He stirs up His zeal; He cries out, He shouts aloud, He shows Himself mighty against His foes" (Is. 42:13). Our LORD is a victorious warrior, who triumphs over His enemies on behalf of His people.

Jesus's death and resurrection, too, is like a military victory, and the proclamation of that victory by the angels, by the women at the tomb, by the apostles, and down through the ages until the end of time is a proclamation that the battle is over and the victory is won. The suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ were all part of the battle. Colossians 2[:14–15] says God nailed the record of our debt to the cross, by which He "disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in Christ." Our sins deserved nothing but wrath and punishment, but that wrath and punishment was taken out on Jesus when He died on the cross. There He suffered the death sentence that we earned. The enemy can no longer accuse us for our sins because Jesus suffered the punishment for our sins already.

In 1 Corinthians 15, the Apostle Paul tells us that at the End, Jesus will then "deliver the Kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death (vv. 24–26) . . . then shall come to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory . . . thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ'" (vv. 54–57).

We also sing of Jesus's triumphant victory over sin, death, and the Devil in our hymns for Easter. "Death and life have contended in that combat stupendous: The Prince of life, who died, reigns immortal. . . Have mercy, victor King, ever reigning!" (LSB 460). "The strife is o'er, the

battle done; Now is the victor's triumph won; Now be the song of praise begun. The pow'rs of death have done their worst, But Christ their legions hath dispersed." (LSB 464). Our Lord's victory over sin, death, and the devil is a military victory, in a spiritual sense. The commander of the Lord's army, Jesus Christ, has defeated the legions of Hell in His death!

Jesus then descended into Hell, as we confess in the Creed every Sunday, to proclaim to the spirits in prison His victory over sin, death, and the devil. Jesus "destroyed Hell for all believers and delivered them from the power of death and of the devil, from eternal condemnation and the jaws of Hell," as our Lutheran Confessions say (FC Ep IX 4). So now "neither Hell nor the Devil can take captive or injure us and all who believe in Christ" (SD IX 3). That's why artistic depictions of Christ's descent into Hell often have Him holding a military victory banner, with the cross depicted as a kind of weapon. The cross upon which Jesus died becomes a symbol of His victory.

Our LORD conquered sin, death, and Hell for the whole world, but where were His fellow-soldiers? Judas betrayed our Lord and then went and hanged himself. Peter denied knowing Jesus three times before the rooster crowed. The other disciples were hiding away in the upper room, afraid of what would happen to them. The women went to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus, to prepare Him for proper burial. They all assumed Jesus was dead and would stay dead. Nobody took Jesus's claim seriously that the Son of Man would be handed over, killed, buried, and on the third day rise again from the dead. Those who were closest to our LORD became deserters on the field of battle, when it seemed everything would be lost.

Jesus could have called His disciples deserters and traitors, but instead He tells the women: "Do not be afraid; go and tell my *brothers* to go to Galilee, and there they will see me" (Matt 28:10). Jesus calls those who abandoned Him *brothers*. They are called "brothers" because

they share with Jesus the same Father, God the Father. The message Jesus sent to His disciples was not: “look out, vengeance is coming.” No, Jesus sent them word, saying: “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” The death and resurrection of Jesus doesn’t just mean that our enemies are destroyed; it also means we are reconciled with God. The cross of Jesus Christ bridges the divide sin created between us and God, and the resurrection of Jesus confirms that God no longer sees us as enemies, but as His children, as brothers of Jesus Christ our Lord who share in His inheritance of eternal life.

And our Lord Jesus Christ gives you that inheritance in Holy Baptism, where He makes you His brothers and sons of God: “for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” In Baptism, God applies the death and resurrection of Jesus to you personally. You join Jesus in His death, and so you will also be raised from the dead on the Last Day just as He was. As the Apostle Paul says in Romans 6: “Do you now know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by Baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His . . . Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death He died He died to sin, once for all, but the life He lives He lives to God.” In Baptism, you are no longer deserters or traitors on account of your sin, but you become sons and daughters of the King and brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ.

As baptized children of God, we also become “soldiers of Christ Jesus.” That’s what Paul calls Christians who share in the sufferings of our LORD (2 Tim 2:3; Philemon 2; Phil 2:25).

That's also why Paul instructs the baptized in Ephesians 6 to "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might," to "put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil." We continue struggling against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against spiritual forces in the heavenly places. The war has come to an end and victory is pronounced in the resurrection of Jesus. But skirmishes continue. The enemy will continue fighting to the bitter end, but our Lord prepares us for the battles ahead, until that time when the final victory trumpet is sounded and the risen Lord Jesus Christ comes to raise us from the dead, to live with Him forever. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.