

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Festival of the Resurrection of our Lord

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Sermon by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz

Elevated thinking

—Colossians 3:1-4

“If Christ has not been raised, your faith is useless; you are still in your sins. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:17,20). With those words the Apostle Paul lays out the litmus test for Christianity. The Christian faith stands or falls on the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. If Jesus died and stayed dead, then he was a fraud. But he didn’t stay dead. He died brutally on Friday, but on Sunday his heart started beating again, and since he left the grave victorious, he shows his power over death—a power no one else on earth possesses. He proves that he is the Son of God. He proves that his words of promise are true. He proves that he really did die for the sin of the world, and God the Father really did accept his sacrificial payment. He proves that your sins really are forgiven. He proves that he has power to create and to destroy, to lay down his life and to take it up again, to put to death and to make alive. He proves it all: his power, his divinity, your forgiveness, your justification, your salvation, your immortality, your eternal life with him in heaven. He proves it all by his resurrection from the dead.

Jesus’ resurrection from the dead changes everything!

Not only does Jesus’ resurrection change our identity, our status before God, our place in heaven, our immortality. It changes the way we think. It changes the way we view the world, this life, other people. Because Christ has been raised, because Jesus is in heaven seated at God’s right hand, Paul the apostle invites us to set our hearts and our minds on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. It’s time for some elevated thinking!

What a huge contrast we see between elevated Easter thinking and what we see all around us in the world today. Tragically, sadly, most people are groping their way through this life in a fog of confusion, inconsistency of thought, disjointed, narrow thinking. The thinking goes something like this: Live for the moment. Do what makes you happy. Do what feels good. Don’t think beyond Saturday night. Don’t think about your larger purpose for existing. If you’re sad, buy a new toy or find a new relationship to cheer you up. Cling to false hopes. Don’t think too much about God—unless you’re really in a jam or you need someone to blame for your problems. Don’t think about the inevitable end of life, don’t think about your own mortality. Don’t think about the fact that every human being is conceived and born under a death sentence. Console yourself that death is a long way off. Death is for other people, the old, the infirm. Stay fit, active, healthy and eat right, and you’ll cheat death. Blindly go through life living from moment to moment, from weekend to weekend, from birthday party to birthday party, from sporting event to sporting event, from vacation to vacation—living for whatever consumes and distracts—all the while accelerating down a steepening path that ends inevitably, 100% of the time, in death.

With that kind of confused, disjointed, blind, detached-from-reality thinking, it’s no wonder that human beings have trouble connecting the dots. A worldwide pandemic hits, and people are filled with dread and fear. Why? Because the death sentence that hangs over every one of us is a new thing? Because death is more real now than it always has been? Because our human mortality is now more deadly than it was two months ago? Because the statistics on human mortality have changed with the arrival and spread of a global pandemic? No! None of those things are true. Because the fact that everyone on this planet has always had a date in the judgment to meet their Maker has always been the case. Nothing has changed. But whether it’s a worldwide pandemic that touches millions and kills tens of thousands, or it’s a car accident or a cancer diagnosis or a heart attack that kills *me*, it exposes that fact that without Jesus, without the forgiveness of our sins, a human being is unprepared to meet death. Unprepared for the inevitable! That is a dumb way to live. It is foolish. It is hopeless. It leaves us helpless, groping our way through the fog of life until we trip over the edge into the abyss. That is not elevated thinking!

So what does the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead do for us to change that? It changes the way we think. And because it changes the way we think, it changes the way we live.

“Since you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.” Elevate your thinking, because you have been raised with Christ. You have been brought from death to life. You were dead in sin, now you are alive in Christ. The wages of sin is death; Jesus has set you free from your death sentence. “You were dead in your transgressions and sins, but God, who is rich in mercy, made you alive with Christ, even when you dead in transgressions; it is by grace you have been saved” (Ephesians 2). How were you raised with Christ? You were baptized into Jesus. The Holy Spirit opened your eyes and gave you

faith to trust in Jesus as your Savior from sin. You were washed in Jesus' blood, his holy precious blood, the blood of God himself, that cleansed you from all your sins. You were given a spirit of repentance and faith to trust only in Jesus for your forgiveness. You were brought into God's holy family, washed, cleansed, made a child of God.

Now set your minds on things above! You are a new person in Jesus. You are a new creation in Christ. Elevate your thinking! Having been raised with Christ you have been given new life, purpose, meaning, clarity of thought. Do you realize how you as a Christ-follower, in contrast to the muddled, cannot-connect-the-dots thinking of this blind world, you have a coherent, clear, consistent thought process and philosophy of life to carry you through this life? You and I know that we have sinned. But we have the antidote to sin. It's called "forgiveness," and it is full and complete in Jesus! You know you are forgiven! Jesus was delivered over to death for our sins and raised to life for our justification (Romans 4:25).

Look at the situation we find ourselves in now. Let's apply some elevated thinking; let's look at the big picture. There is lots of work being done to defeat COVID right now, an energetic search for a vaccine, and that would be awesome! What a blessing it would be not to have deal with all this if a vaccine could just provide immunity, and all this goes away. But an antidote to COVID is temporary. A cure for cancer is temporary. Blood thinners and bypass surgery to avoid a heart attack are temporary. Pick the disease, pick the malady, pick the treatment—it's temporary! We need something bigger than an answer or an antidote to every kind of malady we might encounter in this life. We need an answer, an antidote to death itself. And we have it! It's called "the resurrection!" And it's guaranteed to us in Jesus Christ, who himself rose from the dead and has promised to raise us from the dead. We have the answer and antidote to death itself. It's the promise of eternal life coming from Jesus, who is the resurrection and the life!

It's no surprise that the resurrection of the dead is met with scoffs of disbelief. Dead people don't come back to life again. The idea that someone's heart could start beating again after they've been three days in the grave, much less dead for centuries and long turned to dust seems like a silly fantasy. But that's because people don't know the power of God the Creator. We know where we came from. We know that God formed us originally, made us, gave us our bodies and our souls, breathed into us the breath of life. Each one of us is a creature of God Almighty, who formed us in our mother's womb, made us who we are, placed us on this earth at this time and in this place, so that we could live out his purpose in our lives. These are not abstract concepts. These are daily realities. This is who we are and what we're here for: to know and fear God, to keep his commands, and to honor him above all things, and to love our neighbor, to live the fullness of life in Jesus, who said, "I have come that [you] may have life and have it to the full!"

And what about your daily existence in all this unsettled chaos? Elevate your thinking! Your life is now hidden with Christ in God. God's providence has cared for you since the moment you were conceived. God brought you to this glorious day of grace, which he the Lord himself has made. God has made sure you have always had everything you need for your body and life: breath in your lungs, food on your table, clothes on your back, shelter over your head, people who love and care for you. God provides food for the sparrows and covers the desert in wildflowers; he certainly cares for and clothes you. He has, and he will. Put your worries and fears aside and rest confidently in him! For comfort, for peace, for the certainty of God's love and forgiveness, you are tucked away safely and securely in his love, in the righteousness of Christ.

Elevate your thinking! Clear your head. Pull your head out of the daily litany of bad news. Leave behind the case counts and the mortality numbers. Stop the hand-wringing about economic disaster and the worrying about unemployment. Get your head above all of that and let your mind and spirit soar. Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Let your spirit soar heavenward, to the right hand of power and victory over death. You are going to live forever. When Christ, who is your life appears, you also will appear with him in glory. You have a home in heaven. Jesus has guaranteed it with his blood shed on the Good Friday. He has sealed it with his empty tomb on Easter Sunday. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.