

Jesus Lives! Hallelujah!

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Easter

April 25, 2010

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church

Hecla

**Text: Mark 2:18-22 *And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees were fasting. And they came and said to Him, "Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?" So Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days. No one sews a piece of un-shrunk cloth on an old garment; or else the new piece pulls away from the old, and the tear is made worse. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins."***

**Theme: REJOICE IN THE PRESENCE OF OUR LIVING LORD!**

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus,

Which Christian holiday is your favorite? Reformation Festival with all those good Lutheran hymns? Singing "Joy to the World" and "Silent Night" at Christmas? What about the children singing "Hosanna, Loud Hosanna!" on Palm Sunday? As important and beloved as each of these holidays or "holy days" are, they all pale in comparison to the awesomeness of Easter, don't they. While we love to sing and rejoice in the birth of our Savior, if His body were still in a tomb somewhere, the day of His birth would have been no more important than the birth of Abraham or Moses. It is the resurrection from the dead that sets Jesus above and beyond all others.

Easter is a truly glorious day. Can you remember leaving an Easter service depressed or sad? Having heard the truth that our Savior is risen from the dead we know that our sins are forgiven and that we too shall rise from the dead. The hymns only add to the joy of the Easter service. Hearing young and old singing, mostly from memory, hymns like, "I Know My Redeemer Lives" and "Christ the Lord is Risen Today, Hallelujah!" is a truly joyous sound. Easter is a time to celebrate as we hear that Jesus has conquered death!

As joyous as Easter is, how long is it before we come down from that high? The realities of life set in pretty quickly after we leave church - our personal debt, our national debt, our difficulties at home, our difficulties at school, trouble at work, another bill to pay, our pastor gets a call to another congregation. All these things burden our hearts and minds and make the joy of Easter seem so far away.

In our text for this morning we hear of two different attitudes. One is the sorrow of being trapped under the weight of the Law and the other is the joy of being in the presence of the living Lord! Let us consider this morning the theme of "Rejoice in the presence of our Living Lord!" May the Holy Spirit increase our faith in Jesus that our resurrection joy may never fade!

Our text begins with a question about fasting. Fasting is a term used to describe when

people either do not eat food or do not drink water for a period of time - or in some occasions both. For instance, if you have to have blood work done the doctor may require that you fast for 12 hours before going to have your blood drawn. That is the doctor does not want you to eat food or drink anything other than water for the twelve hours prior to having your lab work done.

While most of us have little experience with fasting today, in Jesus' day the people would have been very familiar with fasting. We know that Jesus fasted for forty days and forty nights as He battled the temptations of Satan in the Wilderness. During those forty days Jesus went without food. As far as God was concerned, there was only one day out of the year in which He commanded His people to fast and that was on the Day of Atonement. This day was a sort of national day of repentance. On the Day of Atonement the sins of the people were confessed, symbolically placed on a goat, and that goat sacrificed on the altar for the sins of the people, along with a young bull and a ram. On this day of repentance and sorrow over sin, fasting was a reminder of sin.

While God commanded only one fast, over the years a few annual fasts were added. There was a fast in the fifth month to mark the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. A fast was held in the fourth month on the anniversary of the Chaldeans entrance into Jerusalem. The people remembered the anniversaries of these somber events by fasting. Throughout the Old Testament various fasts were held, such as when Israel faced a humiliating defeat. Again, fasts were held as signs of sorrow and repentance.

But by the time of Jesus fasts had become little more than an outward show of piety. The Pharisees reveled in their fasts to show just how godly they were. Remember the parable of the Pharisee and the publican? The Pharisee boasted to God about fasting how many time? Twice a week. The truly "godly" Pharisees would fast on Mondays and Thursdays, to mark their tradition that on those days Moses descended and ascended onto Mount Sinai to receive the Law.

While they prided themselves on their asceticism, they looked down on the seeming excesses of Jesus and His disciples. ***"Why do the disciples of John and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?"*** As usual, this was probably an overstatement by Jesus' opponents. We know Jesus was faithful to the Law of God in the truest sense, and on the God-appointed fasts Jesus certainly would have kept and would have commanded His disciples to keep.

Jesus replied to this question of fasting, ***"Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast."*** Who ever heard of going to a wedding reception and being sad? Who has turned down the buffet, punch, and cake? No one! Weddings are at time of rejoicing and merriment, especially if you are part of the wedding party! It is only after the bride and groom have left the reception that things begin to wind down.

So it is with Jesus and His disciples. This was not a time of sobriety and mortification. This was a time of rejoicing! Jesus, the Messiah and their Savior was with them. Now is not the time to be sorrowful and fast. ***"They cannot fast,"*** Jesus replied. That time would come, Jesus says. ***"But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days."*** Jesus is pointing ahead to the day when He would be forcibly taken from them and crucified. That would be a time of great sorrow for them. While Scripture does not explicitly tell us, knowing the sorrow of the disciples it is not difficult to imagine them abstaining from eating food on that Saturday before Easter. But not now. Not at this time. The Bridegroom, Jesus, was with them. It would have been wrong to be sorrowful with Jesus around.

Where do we fit in to all this? If you were to ask people outside of Lutheranism what emotion best describes Lutherans, they would probably reply, "No emotion." Lutherans are seen as rather somber and sublime. In fact, I once overheard a conversation a young Lutheran woman was having. She was conflicted about how she felt after receiving Lord's Supper and how that emotion would be perceived by others in her congregation. She said something to the effect of, "I've just received the body and blood of my Savior. Sometimes I feel like I want to have a big smile on my face other times I feel like I want to cry for joy. But I'm afraid of what people would think."

Do we run the danger of following in the footsteps of the Pharisees by thinking we have to be somber Christians to be godly Christians? The Pharisees thought they were somehow serving God by not eating food two days a week. But these acts did not come from a heart of faith. They did not refrain from eating because they were so sorry for the sins they had committed. This was a matter of pride for them. They were proud and even boasted that they went beyond the commands of God. "You fast once a year? I fast twice a week!" They were also after the praise of men. "Look at how godly those Pharisees are! They abstain from eating twice a week."

Every Sunday we assemble in God's house to make confession of our sins. And verily we should! How we have sinned against our God during the week! How undeserving we are of any good and precious gift from the Almighty. We come loaded down by our sins and want that burden removed and to hear of our sins forgiven. It is truly a somber attitude which we have because of the many ways we have offended our God - in thought, word, and deed. But let us not simply go through the outward act of somberly confessing our sins, as if the act in and of itself will merit something from God or praise from me. If we are simply going through the motions our many confessions are no different than the many fasts which the Pharisees had. No, let us worship and confess our sins to God in spirit and in truth!

But is it a godly attribute to always be somber and sorrowful? Should we conduct ourselves and our lives much like the disciples did on the Saturday before Easter? One of fasting and sorrow? We are forever sorrowful only if Easter morning never came. If Jesus had been taken from us and never rose, then we have reason to fast for then our sins are not forgiven - we are still sinners in the hands of an angry God. As Paul writes to the Corinthians, "***And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!***" (1 Cor 15:17)

But what happened on Easter? Did Jesus remain in the tomb on the third day? He rose, just as He said He would! His resurrection means that our every last one of sins have been paid for! Even those ugly sins which paint your past. Paul testifies of this to the Romans, "***Jesus was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.***" (Rom 4:25) God put Jesus on the cross because of our sins and God raised Jesus because of our justification. The Judge of souls rendered His public verdict of "not guilty" when He raised Jesus from the dead.

How can we fast while Jesus is with us? It is the living Lord who has promised us, "***For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.***" (Mt 18:20) Our living Lord is present with us right here, right now as we are gathered together in His name! Let us rejoice in His presence! It is the living Lord who has promised us, "***I am with you always, even to the end of the age.***" (Mt 28:20) Our living Lord is with us wherever we go! It is the living Lord who has said in Holy Communion, "Take, eat, this is My body given for you...Take, drink, this is My blood shed for the remission of your sins." Our living Lord gives to

us not just a token or a symbol to think about, but His very body and blood! The living Lord is truly present in this meal!

Make no mistake about it, there is a time to be somber and sorrowful. Our sins and offenses against God ought to cut us to the heart. But having confessed our sins and having been assured of our forgiveness in Jesus and His resurrection, should we still be filled with sorrow? Should we have a fasting attitude? NO! Jesus lives, the victory is won! Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! Our sins have been removed forever! Heaven has been opened and is our home! Jesus, the Bridegroom, is with His bride the Church! ***“As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast.”*** Having been assured of our forgiveness and salvation let us rejoice in the presence of our living Lord! Jesus is risen indeed, hallelujah! Amen.