

April 24, 2011
Sermon for Easter Sunday – Sunrise
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
1 Corinthians 15:19-25

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

1 Corinthians 15:19-25 (ESV)

¹⁹ If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. ²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. ²⁴ Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

1

¹ *The Holy Bible : English Standard Version.* Wheaton : Standard Bible Society, 2001

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

Amen.

In a cemetery a short distance from King's Cross Station in London, England, there is a huge, multi-trunked tree that grows out of a grave that belongs to Lady Anne Grimston, who dies over a century ago. Because Lady Grimston did not believe in life after death, she ordered that her final resting place should be a vandal-proof, reinforced stone tomb, covered by a huge slab of marble. Square blocks of stone connected to each other and to the marble slab with heavy iron clamps, plus an iron railing were there to further prevent any tampering.

For years, the lady and her tomb were all but forgotten, until someone passing by one day noticed that the marble slab had been moved slightly. A sapling had sprouted, and its root had made its way between a side stone and the upper slab. Slowly but surely, the tree grew up until it opened several of the iron clamps and moved the marble lid. Today, that heavy marble slab rests against the trunk of a massive tree. Lady Grimston's extraordinary precautions were all in vain. No one can close her tomb. It is open to all of the world.

Over 19 centuries ago, another tomb was made as secure as possible. Every precaution was taken to prevent entrance or exit from this above ground grave that had been cut out of rock. As if someone needed to worry about exiting a tomb. Once the body had been placed in this new tomb, the owner rolled a heavy stone in front of the entrance. Then the local governor ordered a

detachment of soldiers to stand guard, and a seal was placed on the stone bearing the authority of the Roman government.

And still, with all of these precautions, 36 hours later, that tomb in Jerusalem was found open, the stone was rolled back, the guards gone, the seal broken and the lifeless body that had been laid inside, was missing. This fact, that there was no body in the grave, brings us here this Easter morning.

The reason that we are here this morning is because: He Is *RISEN*! He is Risen indeed, Alleluia! Unbelievers deny it, the intellectual and liberal thinkers call it foolishness, but the doctrine of the resurrection is the single most important fact in the world. The doctrine of the resurrection is what sets Christianity apart from all other religions and belief systems. The bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith. Everything we believe, teach, and confess stands or falls on the validity of the resurrection.

During the six Lenten mid-week services, we have been telling each other that Jesus Christ is our Passover. First, He is our Passover Lamb. Just as the angel of death so long ago Passover the houses and tents marked with the blood of the sacrificial lamb, so God passes over the forgiven sins of the person marked with Jesus' blood.

Jesus is also our Passover host. Not only does He wash our hands, according to ritual, but He gets down on His knees to wash our feet, to be our servant. As our host, He also serves us the Passover meal. He heaps bitter herbs on our plate to remind us that on this side of heaven, life will be difficult and to remind us that He died to deal with the root cause of all our troubles – our

sin. He serves us unleavened bread, that is bread uncontaminated with the leaven of our corruption and evil. He feeds us His own unleavened, sinless body.

Greater still, He offers to us, not once, but continuously until He returns, the third Passover cup of wine, the cup of blessings and redemption. No matter how we have failed Him or disappointed Him...or even denied Him, He continues to offer it. He has set a place at His table for you – however ornery or difficult any of us have been. At the same time, he alone steps forward to drain dry the cup of God's anger for our sin.

And just this past Friday, the one that we call good, we remembered in horror as God the Father, spent His righteous anger and wrath on His only Son, who became our sacrificial Lamb. The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And God had mercy on us...on you.

1 Corinthians 15:20 tells us that this Lamb, is the One who *"has been raised from the dead."* Christ, our Passover Lamb, Christ our Passover Host, Christ, our Sacrifice. Our Text goes on to say something that might sound a little bit curious. It calls Jesus: *"the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."*

But what does this mean? In Leviticus 23, we are told that as part of the Passover celebration, several days after the Passover seder meal, on the day after the Sabbath, God directed His people to observe the firstfruits festival. (Lev. 23:9-11). Each farmer went into his field, cut a sheaf of the first ripe grain, but left the rest in the field. Then he would take it to the priest to be offered as a wave offering; a sacrifice. After God accepted this sacrifice, the farmer was permitted to harvest the rest of his crop.

Jesus was crucified at Passover. On the Sabbath day, Saturday, He rested in the tomb. But on the first day after the Sabbath, early Sunday morning, which would have been the same morning that the priest offered up the firstfruits of grain, Jesus rose from the dead.

Is this a coincidence? What is God telling us here? He is telling us that the harvest can commence! God's Word continues through Paul in 1 Corinthians: *"²¹ For as by a man [Adam] came death, by a man [Jesus] has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ."* 1 Corinthians 15:21-23 (ESV)

What does that mean for us? Let me tell you; because He lives, we shall live also! Death no longer has any hold over us. Why? Because Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

As Christ has defeated death, He has defeated sin and the power of the devil, which further means that because He lives, because He is Risen!, He is stronger than any temptation. He is King of kings and Lord of lords.

Dear Christian, Jesus is your firstfruit...that is great news! You can face tomorrow because He lives. But even better, you can face eternity, because through faith in Him, this Christ who is Risen **** you have the promise that you will rise too...and live eternally in His kingdom. Praise God, because Christ is Risen.

He is Risen indeed, Alleluia!

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.