

President's Piece for Peace

Rev. Dr. Brian S. Saunders
District President

APRIL 2018

"This Joyful Eastertide Away with sin and sorrow!" The poet of this hymn places one characteristic upon Easter. It is the character of Joy. He is telling us this to show that joy is as much state of being as it is an emotion. The two are very closely tied together, the state of joy evokes joyful responses. The joy is our joy in the fact that it is founded on God's blessing carried out on account of our need.

C.F.W. Walther once preached an Easter sermon that drove this point home. It is a sermon that bestows joy and evokes a joyful response. At the time of the sermon Walther had come through a dark time in his life and struggled with joy. The nation had recently been torn in two by a Civil War and was trying to mend. The consequences of the war hung a dark cloud over the hearts and minds of Walther's congregations. This sermon was timely for him, for the flock and for the church at large. I quote a section of it for you so you too may soak in the joy of Easter, from the lips of our first Synod president, who stood steadfast especially in the tough times:

Christ has not suffered and died for himself but for all men; he did not therefore rise for himself but for all men. When Christ suffered and died, he as it were descended into the depths of the sea to find the costly pearl of our redemption. When he rose from the depths of the seas and as it were cried: I have found it! I have found it! What had he found? The pearl of our redemption.

When Christ suffered and died, he was the Lamb of God who did not carry his own sins but the sins of the world. And when he rose, we see no sins in him; we see that he no longer bears the form of a servant, the form of sinful flesh. He threw off the burden of sin and left it in his grave. Where are our sins? They are carried out of sight of God; they are forever buried.

When Christ suffered and died, he was punished for the sake of our sins; our sins were imputed to him...But when he arose, we see him freed of all punishment. Whose punishment has come to an end? The punishment of men.

When Christ suffered and died, he wanted to pay the debt which our sins had incurred... When he arose our surety was freed from the debtor's prison and set free. Where is the account book against us? It is torn up; all our sins are paid; God the Father has himself declared by the resurrection of Christ, that he will demand no more payment from us.

When Christ suffered and died, he offered himself on the altar of the cross for the reconciliation of men with God. When God awakened him God himself publicly shows that he accepted the sacrifice of his Son and found it of full value. This proves that God is reconciled with us.

When Christ suffered and died, he as our General, as the Lord of our salvation, as our David, began the great battle with our enemies, the Law, sin, death, and the Devil. When he arose, behold! He had fulfilled the Law, conquered sin, robbed death of his power, crushed the head of the Devil, the Old Serpent, destroyed hell, and triumphed over the Prince of Darkness and his whole army. As his battle was our battle, so is also his victory our victory, his triumph our triumph, his conquest our conquest. They were our enemies that have been laid at the feet of the resurrected Savior.

When Christ suffered and died, God condemned him to death in our place. When God the Father again awakened him, who was acquitted by God in the person of Christ? Christ needed no acquittal for himself, for no one could accuse him of a sin. Tell me, who was justified in him? Who was declared pure and guiltless in him? We were. The whole world was. God's words to Christ: You shall live! Applied to us. His life is our life, his acquittal our acquittal, his justification our justification.

Can the joy of Easter be expressed any better than that? Along with C.F.W. Walther sometimes our days can get gloomy and a veil of gray overshadow us in our churchly vocations. The nation

we love and live in has troubles mounting from day to day without end in sight. The flock we tend and the children we teach also suffer from the consequences of a fallen world. And yet the poet of the hymn gives us reason to be joyful in the midst of all of it when he writes: "Had Christ, who once was slain, Not burst His three-day prison, Our faith had been in vain: But now has Christ arisen, arisen, arisen; But now has Christ arisen. Amen and Amen!"

Blessed Easter in its Joy filled season,
President Saunders.

