**Easter Song Service**

*April 12, 2020*

**A Festival Commemorating Three Trees**

**Introduction**

A feast is a joyous celebration. The Passover feast attended by Jesus and his disciples before his crucifixion was a positive moment before many dark and negative moments. If the Passover commemorated the deliverance of Israel from the harsh tyranny of their Egyptian taskmasters, how much more is the day of our deliverance from the tyranny of sin, death and hell, a day to rejoice!

Jesus’ resurrection was the seal of his victory as the promised Seed of the Woman, a victory foretold at the foot of the Tree of Knowing Good and Evil, the tree that resulted in all the havoc caused by our parent’s first sin.

But the second tree undoes the sin and consequence. On the Tree of the Cross Christ suffered all pain and punishment that frees us forever from our sins, as the Scriptures say, “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree...by his wounds you have been healed,” (I Peter 2:24).

The Tree of the Cross is the bridge to the Tree of Life from which we will partake forevermore in heaven. Today’s service speaks in greater detail of each tree and how they are part of our Christian life.

The initial thoughts of this devotional path were written by now-sainted Professor Wilbert Gawrisch in an article in the Northwestern Lutheran magazine (now “Forward in Christ”) and adapted by Pastor Russell Kloehn.

**Festival Music** *Christ Jesus Lay in Death’s Strong Bands,* Arr. By Valerie A. Floeter

**Opening Hymn: Christian Worship 149** v. 1-4*Christ the Lord Is Risen Today*

“Christ the Lord is ris’n today!” Saints on earth and angels say;

Raise your joys and triumphs high; Sing, O heav’ns, and earth, reply

Love’s redeeming work is done, fought the fight, the battle won;

Lo, our sun’s eclipse is o’er; Lo, he sets in blood no more.

Vain the stone, the watch, the seal; Christ has burst the gates of hell.

Death in vain forbids his rise; Christ has opened paradise.

Lives again our glorious King! Where, O death, is now your sting?

Once he died our souls to save; Where your victory, O grave?

**P: Dear people of God, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

**Hymn: CW 163** *Welcome, Happy Morning*

“Welcome, happy morning!” Age to age shall say;

“Hell today is vanquished; Heav’n is won today!”

Lo, the Dead is living, God forevermore!

Him, their true Creator, all his works adore.

“Welcome, happy morning!” Age to age shall say;

“Hell today is vanquished; Heav’n is won today!”

*(Turn page for additional verses)*

Maker and Redeemer, Life and Health of all,

God from heav’n beholding human nature’s fall,

Of the Father’s Godhead you, the only Son,

Mankind to deliver, manhood did put on.

“Welcome, happy morning!” Age to age shall say;

“Hell today is vanquished; Heav’n is won today!”

He, of life the author, death did undergo,

Trod the path of darkness, saving strength to show.

Come, then, True and Faithful, now fulfill your word;

This is your third morning--rise, O buried Lord!

“Welcome, happy morning!” Age to age shall say;

“Hell today is vanquished; Heav’n is won today!”

Free the souls long prisoned, bound with Satan’s chain;

All that now is fallen raise to life again.

Show your face in brightness; shine in ev’ry land

As in Eden’s garden when the world began.

“Welcome, happy morning!” Age to age shall say;

“Hell today is vanquished; Heav’n is won today!”

**“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” “In his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” (I Peter 1:3) “Shout for joy, O heavens, rejoice, O earth, for the Lord comforts his people.” (Isaiah 49:13) “This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” (Psalm 118:24)**

**Hymn: CW 225** v. 1, 2, 5 *This is the Day the Lord Has Made*

This is the day the Lord has made; he calls the hours his own.

Let heav’n rejoice; let earth be glad and praise surround the throne.

Today he rose and left the dead, and Satan’s empire fell;

Today the saints his triumphs spread and all his wonders tell.

Hosanna in the highest strains the Church on earth shall raise;

The highest heav’ns, in which he reigns, shall give him nobler praise.

**Devotional Thoughts: The Tree of Knowing Good and Evil**

*Romans 5:17 - “By the trespass of the one man, death reigned through the one man.”*

There are many examples of the beautiful art of stained-glass windows, that contain the ugliest of pictures. It’s not that the craftsmen who made the windows suddenly lost their skills. The problem is that it shows a serpent coiled around a tree. That serpent is Satan, and the tree is the Tree of Knowing Good and Evil.

The glories of Easter have their roots in the ugliness of Eden. In the Garden, God had planted two special trees: The Tree of Life, and the Tree of Knowing Good and Evil. This second tree was a tree of testing to give man an opportunity to demonstrate his love for his loving Creator. Generously, God gave man permission to eat of all the trees in the Garden with one exception. Lovingly, he warned that eating of this tree would surely bring death.

Entering into a serpent, Satan, the father of lies, approached the woman. Slyly he directed her attention to the forbidden tree and countered God’s warning with an outright lie. “You will not surely die,” he whispered. “You will be like God, knowing good and evil.” That was his bait.

Eve eyed the tree. The fruit certainly looked good to eat. How luscious—and to think it could make one wise! Eve stretched out her hand. She picked the fruit and took a bite. “Here, try it!” she said to Adam, and he did.

The die was cast. Man chose friendship with Satan over fellowship with the Father. He rejected God’s truth and believed the devil’s lie. Now man knew evil, to be sure, but what a disappointment it was! Instead of transmitting blessing or happiness, it brought shame, guilt and fear.

Adam’s sin has affected the whole human race. In his righteousness God justly charged Adam’s offense against all his descendants. “By the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, because all sinned” (Romans 5:17)! Man is now by nature an enemy of God, loves what is evil, and hates what is good. He is spiritually dead and doomed to eternal death. All by the abuse of a tree. What an ugly picture!

Want to see something else ugly? Look into your own heart. If the devil doesn’t lure you into the swamp of crime and vice, he may well be successful in destroying you instead with the arrows of pride. Neither is a pretty picture. To know evil seems preferable to knowing righteousness.

Trembling with fear, Adam and Eve expected God to pronounce on them a sentence of doom. What a surprise to hear him say instead to the deceiver, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers. And he will crush your head!” Instead of allowing the friendship between humans and Satan to be the only relationship going forward, God’s words promise rescue and hope! He will restore the fellowship with him through the son of the woman and Son of God who would blow Satan away. The Easter sun was beginning to rise already in Eden in this promise.

The promise was fulfilled “when the time had fully come, (and) God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law to redeem those under law,” (Galatians 4:4,5). That Son “became sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God,” (II Corinthians 5:21). The picture has become much prettier because of Christ.

**Hymn: CW 378** v. 1, 4, 5 *All Mankind Fell in Adam’s Fall*

All mankind fell in Adam’s fall; one common sin infects us all.

From one to all the curse descends, and over all God’s wrath impends.

But Christ, the second Adam, came to bear our sin and woe and shame,

To be our life, our light, our way, our only hope, our only stay.

As by one man all mankind fell and, born to sin, was doomed to hell,

So by one Man, who took our place, we all were justified by grace.

**Devotional Thoughts: The Tree of the Cross**

 *Galatians 3:13 - “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.”*

 *Hebrews 2:14,15 - “Through death he could destroy the one who had the power of*

*death (that is, the Devil) and free those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death.”*

Throughout Lent, as we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, in the spoken preface to the singing of the Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy) we thank God that Jesus died on the cross “so that the devil, who overcame us by a tree would in turn by a tree be overcome.” The one tree bests the other. But the defeat of Satan is by the seeming defeat of Christ. He must die.

But it was according to God’s purpose and foreknowledge that Jesus was delivered into the hands of the Jews. On Palm Sunday they hailed him as their King. Five days later they want no king but Caesar. On Palm Sunday they shout his praise. Five days later they call for his blood. Their hosannas were not long past when “Crucify” became their cry. With the help of wicked men like Herod and Pontius Pilate they nailed him to the tree of the cross. “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree,” God’s law declared (Galatians 3:13). But the curse he bore, he bore for us; the death he died, he died for us.

In the unsearchable wisdom of God, the death of the descendant of Eve spelled defeat for the devil. It was God’s eternal plan of salvation that Jesus should die and that “by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death,” (Hebrews 2:14,15). In Christ, God himself intervened for us sinners and crushed the serpent’s head once and for all. How incomparable is God’s love! How amazing is his grace!

On Easter morning the rumbling of an earthquake was the herald of Christ’s victory. An angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled the stone from the door of the sepulcher and sat on it. The tomb was unmistakably empty! “He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him,” the angel announced (Mark 16:6). “Peace be with you!” was the risen Savior’s greeting to his disciples.

We sing in an old Easter hymn:

 The Foe in triumph shouted When Christ lay in the tomb;

 But, lo, he now is routed, His boast is turned to gloom.

 For Christ again is free; In glorious victory

 He who is strong to save Has triumphed o’er the grave.

By means of the one tree Satan overcame our forefather Adam. By the tree of Calvary, Christ the second Adam, overcame our adversary, and opened the pathway to the third tree, our next meditation.

**Hymn: CW 152** v. 1-4 *I Know that My Redeemer Lives*

I know that my Redeemer lives, what comfort this sweet sentence gives!

He lives, he lives, who once was dead; He lives my everliving Head!

He lives triumphant from the grave; He lives eternally to save.

He lives all-glorious in the sky; He lives exalted there on high.

He lives to bless me with his love; He lives to plead for me above.

He lives, my hungry soul to feed; He lives to help in time of need.

He lives to grant me rich supply; He lives to guide me with his eye.

He lives to comfort me when faint; He lives to hear my soul’s complaint.

**Devotional Thoughts: The Tree of Life**

*Revelation 22:2 - “In the middle of the city’s street and on each side of the river was a tree of life that yielded twelve kinds of fruit. The tree yields its fruit every month, and its leaves are for the healing of the nations.”*

After man’s Fall into sin, God drove him out of the Garden and placed at its entrance cherubim and a flaming sword to guard the way back to the Tree of Life. God was acting in his grace, for if man had eaten of that tree, he would have lived forever in sin, and misery, and a living death of being cut off from God.

Sin separates man from God. But with the death of Christ, the debt of sin was paid. “He was delivered over to death for our sins, and was raised to life for our justification,” (Romans 4:25). In Christ, God has reconciled the whole world to himself. Sin is no longer the barrier between us and God. We now have free access to the Tree of Life.

Even death cannot rob us of that right and privilege. Since Jesus our Champion has risen from death, he can promise, “Because I live, you also will live,” (John 14:19). For all who believe in him, death has lost its sting, the grave has lost its victory. For us death is now the gate to Paradise. The gate to the Garden was blocked to keep us from living in sin. Christ has opened the gate of Heaven to keep us from dying forever.

The first paradise in Eden is gone. But we wouldn’t want to have stayed there anyway. The apostle John describes the better beauty of the heavenly Paradise in a vision of gold, pearls forming the gates, jewels adorning the foundations of the City of God. He further describes a river, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. Between the river and the street of gold was a beautiful parkway lined with trees. Here is not one, but a full orchard of Trees of Life, producing a crop for every month of the year. The inhabitants of heaven enjoy a continuous supply of life and salvation, of blessings and riches in abundance.

The Scripture says that the leaves of the trees are for the healing of nations. The death and resurrection of the son of man and Son of God assures that God’s people from every nation, tribe, people and language shall be dressed in the robes of the righteousness of Christ. We shall live eternally in his presence, see him face-to-face, enjoy his friendship and share his glory.

Not bad what a piece of wood can do! Well, really, what Christ did with a piece of wood, changing a tree of death into a tree of life, by the tree of his cross. We praise Christ who has risen and brought such good to us!

**Hymn: CW 152** v. 5-8 *I Know that My Redeemer Lives*

He lives to silence all my fears; He lives to wipe away my tears.

He lives to calm my troubled heart; He lives all blessings to impart.

He lives, my kind, wise, heav’nly friend; He lives and loves me to the end.

He lives, and while he lives I’ll sing; He lives, my Prophet, Priest and King.

He lives and grants me daily breath; He lives and I shall conquer death.

He lives my mansion to prepare; He lives to bring me safely there.

He lives, all glory to his name! He lives, my Jesus, still the same.

Oh, the sweet joy this sentence gives: “I know that my Redeemer lives!”

**Offertory** *This Joyful Eastertide*, Setting by John Leavitt

**Prayer**

Precious Savior Jesus Christ, we thank and praise you that by your suffering on the cross you endured the very agony of hell for us, and that by your death you have reconciled us to God. But especially on this day we thank and praise you for your resurrection from the dead. You have thus proven that the tree of the cross overcame him who deceived our first parents at Eden’s tree. You have defeated him who holds the power of death, and brought us life.

Fill our hearts with hearts with joy as we look forward with longing to the day of our glorious reappearing when you will call all the dead from their graves. By your Spirit’s work, ensure that we are part of the resurrection to eternal life.

Beloved Lord, our Friend in need, be at our side in all our troubles. Give us strength to bear them and wisdom to overcome them. Grant us grace to endure every sorrow, and by them direct us to the knowledge that this world is not our home, but it is with you, with Father and Spirit in the heavenly mansions.

Yet, while we are here, direct us to our fellow men, that as much as is in our power, we seek to relieve their sufferings and encourage their spirits with the word of peace. Make us able servants to share their burdens, and to share your word that they may also know you as the precious Savior and grantor of life. Hear us now, as we pray for those whom we love and care for…

 *Brief silence for personal meditation and prayer*

Let us each learn to love you more, and follow your will more effectively as we wait for the treasures you have won for us. In your own name we ask. Amen.

**Hymn**: **CW # 153** *Alleluia! Jesus Lives*

Alleluia! Jesus lives! He is now the living one;

From the gloomy house of death Forth the conqueror has gone,

Bright forerunner to the skies Of his people, yet to rise.

Jesus lives, Let all rejoice; Praise him, ransomed ones of earth.

Praise him in a nobler song, Cherubim of heav’nly birth.

Praise the Victor-King, whose sway Sin and death and hell obey.

Jesus lives! Why do you weep? Why that sad and frequent sigh?

He who died our brother here Lives our brother still on high,

Lives forever to bestow Blessings on his Church below.

Jesus lives! And thus, my soul, Life is your eternally;

Joined to him, your living head Where he is, you too shall be;

You with him at his right hand Victor over death shall stand.

**Lord’s Prayer**

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen**

**Hymn: CW # 166** v. 1, 3 *The Day of Resurrection*

The day of resurrection! Earth tell it out abroad,

The Passover of gladness, the Passover of God.

From death to life eternal, from this world to the sky,

Our Christ has brought us over with hymns of victory.

Now let the heav’ns be joyful; let earth her song begin.

Let all the world keep triumph and all that is therein.

Let all things, seen and unseen, their notes of gladness blend;

For Christ the Lord has risen; our joy shall have no end.

**Closing Prayer for Easter**

God of all grace, we thank you for the gift of eternal life in your Son. By the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and by the faithful testimony of the apostles, you have assured us that our faith stands on a sure and solid foundation. Preserve us from all assaults to our souls, deliver us from doubt and despair, and preserve us from worldly wisdom and false teachings. As we go from this place, grant peace and rest to us all. Hear us, for we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen

**Blessing**

M: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ †, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

**Closing hymn: CW 150** v. 1-4 *Christ the Lord Is Risen Today; Alleluia!*

Christ the Lord is ris’n today; Alleluia!

Christians, hasten on your way; Alleluia!

See the place where he was laid; Alleluia!

Praise him for the ransom paid. Alleluia!

For the sheep the Lamb has bled, Alleluia!

Sinless in the sinners’ stead. Alleluia!

“Christ is ris’n,” today we cry; Alleluia!

Now he lives, no more to die. Alleluia!

Christ, the victim undefiled, Alleluia!

God and sinners reconciled. Alleluia!

While, in strange and awe-full strife, Alleluia!

Met together death and life. Alleluia!

Christ, who once for sinners bled, Alleluia!

Now the firstborn from the dead, Alleluia!

Throned in endless might and pow’r, Alleluia!

Lives and reigns forevermore. Alleluia!

**Announcements**

**Festival Music** *Jesus Christ Is Risen Today,* Arr. By Charles Callahan

**Resurrection Joy Be Yours,**

**Now and Always!**

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**Easter Encouragement on Another Front**

 The resurrection of Jesus Christ proves that God is in control. When people consider the “absolutes” of this world, death is considered inescapable. No one defeats death--except that God has! He said he would (Mark 8:31), and he did (Mark 16:9-15)! If God can beat the one thing that is inescapable, he is greater than all things!

As we live with the specter of COVID-19 bringing sickness and death, I would like to point out two things:

One, as troublesome as this disease is, it pales in comparison to some other plagues experienced in this world, most notably the Bubonic Plague, or “Black Death” epidemics. While we don’t know the final results of the current infection, the death rate is hovering at about 2% of those who contract the disease. In contrast, the Bubonic plague resulted in about 50% dead in most European cities--in some local areas up to 90%. In just the first wave alone (1347-1350 AD) it’s estimated that over 73,000,000 died just in Europe and the plague hit hard in places as China, India and Russia with similar results. It swept over all those same areas in later waves as well.

The current climate of fear over this virus is unjustified. God is in control. I don’t want to minimize the tragedy. We sympathize with those who have had loved ones die; their death is tragic and we pray for their families’ comfort. The progress of the disease even among those who recover is serious and painful. We ask God to demonstrate his power once again on behalf of those affected.

Second, one of the later waves of the Bubonic plague struck the city of Wittenberg, beginning in August of 1527 and diminishing in November of that same year. The University of Wittenberg itself, where Luther taught, was moved in its entirety first to Jena, then to Schlieben to minimize the effect of the plague on its faculty and students. Luther, however, stayed behind to minister to the sick and dying of Wittenberg.

Luther wrote a 14 page document, and evangelically shared that for some, moving away could be the best solution; but for others, to remain and carry out their God-given tasks was the better choice. I am not attempting to summarize all 14 pages of points and counterpoints.

What I would like to share is a couple thoughts. “When people are dying, they most need a spiritual ministry which strengthens and comforts their consciences by word and sacrament and in faith overcomes death.” We have a privilege to share with others the God who conquers death. As we rejoice in Christ’s resurrection and look forward to joining him in life eternal, we can point others to the same assurance that with sins forgiven in Jesus, they, too, can confidently trust in their personal resurrection.

Further, Luther wrote that disaster of any sort (fire, famine, disease) may be sent “also to test our faith and love—our faith in that we may see and experience how we should act toward God; our love in that we may recognize how we should act toward our neighbor.” How will we do in that regard?

At Our Savior’s we have re-established a phone calling tree in which various members will be taking personal responsibility to ask how each is doing, to share a passage or brief devotion, and to offer assistance to anyone who needs it. This concern for doing good within our family of believers is important (Galatians 6:10).

But can we extend that concern? Within your own neighborhoods, would each of you take up the same task and make it your responsibility to call neighbors or friends to check up on them? Every week or two, find out how people are doing and offer them whatever help you are able to provide. If they ask more than you can do, please let us know and we can help connect them to other sources of assistance.

Let’s make this troubled time an opportunity to demonstrate that Christ’s death and resurrection are more than intellectual beliefs, but affect our personal lives in service to others. May your light shine brightly.