**Weekend of Sunday, April 9, 2022**

**Resurrection of Our Lord/Year A**

**First Reading: Acts 10:34-43**

**Second Reading: Colossians 3:1-4**

**Gospel Reading: Matthew 28:1-10**

***"Jesus Christ ~ the Victor!"***

**Theme**

*This is the day the Lord has made! Christ is risen, and through him all creation is made new! Indeed, “God shows no partiality” (Acts 10:34): Christ’s resurrection truly brings life to everyone. We sing hymns of praise, gather around sacred words, and proclaim God’s faithfulness, power, and love in the feast of Holy Communion. With the women at the tomb, we are astonished, elated, and grateful. We depart with joy to proclaim the good news of God’s endless love.*

**Texts:**

**First Reading: Acts 10:34-43**

34Peter began to speak to [the people]: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, 35but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. 36You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. 37That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: 38how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. 39We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; 40but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, 41not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. 43All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

**Second Reading: Colossians 3:1-4**

1If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, 3for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

**Gospel: Matthew 28:1-10**

1After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. 2And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 4For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. 5But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. 6He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 7Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message for you.” 8So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. 10Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

**Sermon**

True story: I had the Easter sermon all worked out and partially prepared when someone who wishes to remain anonymous, but whose initials are Aloise Wertz, asked me a question. She asked, what do those letters around the transept of Zion's sanctuary cross stand for? If you can't make it out, the image is on the screens and on your bulletin cover.

Without hesitation, I told her, "Jesus Christ, King of the Jews" an inscription that Pilate had placed above the head of Christ when he was crucified (John 19:19). I was *almost positive* I was right, after all, I have walked under that cross for almost eleven years!

I said, "almost positive" didn't I? I came out and checked and that is not what is on our cross at all. Having been a pastor now for over twenty-five years, I was guilty of having too much knowledge of Christian symbols and spoke out of that experience, and I was wrong. And to be honest, after discovering I was wrong, I had no idea what the bottom four symbols represent, so I looked it up.

Patty Hoover, you and your late husband, Donald sponsored that cross. Do you remember what the letters on the cross stand for?

I could tell you what the NI and KA represent, but instead, I am going to read it to you from our beautiful sanctuary dedication booklet of 1966:

*A large oak cross, about eleven feet high, hangs from the ceiling of the Church above the Altar. It has splayed faces and contains four brass panels at the intersection of the Cross, depicting the Greek letters IC, XC, NI, and KA, which are interpreted to mean, "Jesus Christ, the Victor." Throughout its length and width, small cast brass rosettes are inset, representing the Daisy which is symbolic of "The Innocence of the Holy Child."*

So the letters on the transept of our beautiful sanctuary cross literally say, "Jesus Christ, the Victor!" Mind blown!

By the way, before Nike became the preeminent athletic footwear, Nike was the winged Greek goddess of … you guessed it, victory.

I began Good Friday's worship service asking those in attendance to try to put ourselves among the company of Jesus's mother, his disciples, and his other friends, that Friday.

Yes, Jesus their Lord was **disruptive**. He disrupted the Jewish understanding of righteousness. It was commonly understood that people got what they deserved in life as God's blessings and curses. But Jesus disrupted that line of thinking when *he forgave the sins* of others! "Blasphemy!" But then confirmed his power to do so with miracle signs and healings.

Yes, Jesus was **antagonistic**. He preached and taught a different perspective on their god, the God of the Jews. Orthodox Jews weren't even allowed to say the name of God, let alone call God "our Heavenly Father" as Jesus taught (John 5:18). And when he called God his Heavenly Father that meant that he was God's Son, he even said as much a couple of times! Blasphemy!

And yes, he was **argumentative** – he preached and taught that God his Father was love, grace, and mercy, and willing to forgive, and he demonstrated that forgiveness. But as the religious leaders understood it, it was only God through the ministrations of the Temple sacrificial system that sins could be forgiven. And to be honest, the religious leaders were more interested in preserving their sacrificial system. Blasphemy!

Blasphemy, according to Webster's is defined as:

1a: the act of insulting or showing contempt or lack of reverence for God,
1b: the act of claiming the attributes of a deity
2: irreverence toward something considered sacred or inviolable.”

So as far as the Jewish religious leaders were concerned, he met the criteria. He has to die. And so based on their sense of justice and jealousy, I feel I must add, they sent him before Pilate, who couldn't have cared less and actually tried to spare his life, but ironically, the very people he came to minister to had turned against him in just a couple of days. And by Friday night, Mary his mother, his disciples, and friends were left broken-hearted and scared for their lives at worst, and confused and disappointed at best, and Saturday was no better.

But then on that Sunday morning, the one we call Easter Sunday, their world was rocked again! You heard me read Matthew's account. At dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. There was a great earthquake and an angel rolled away the stone and sat on it.

By the way, the only reason the angel is an important part of this story is that it is the angel that rolled away the stone to reveal to the world that it was … an empty tomb! Jesus wasn't in it! He had already resurrected and left the tomb – how did he do that, you ask? I don't know, but if death cannot keep him, a tomb cannot hold him!

Now Pilate had posted guards because the Jewish religious leaders thought someone might steal the body and claim that he had resurrected. Those guards shook and then became like dead men! And the angel said to the women,

“Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. 6He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 7Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’

I can just imagine them standing there, not understanding any of this, but at least allowing themselves to be hopeful that the message that had just heard might be true. Matthew continued that they left quickly with fear and great joy! Ya think?!?

I don't know how far they got, but along the way, they encountered the risen Lord Jesus himself! And they fell down and worshipped him! Once again, their world was turned upside down, but this time with overwhelming joy.

The Gospel Reading for the day ends there, but there is more to the story that the casual Christian may not know, but that I find interesting.

11While they were going, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests everything that had happened. 12After the priests had assembled with the elders, they devised a plan to give a large sum of money to the soldiers, 13telling them, "You must say, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.' 14If this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." 15So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story is still told among the Jews to this day.

Even hearing the report of first-hand eyewitnesses, the religious leaders chose to ignore the truth and its consequences and concocted a story to explain the empty tomb!

Do you find it fascinating that paying a couple of guards to repeat a made-up story that they fell asleep on the job and the only thing they were supposed to prevent from happening, duh, happened?

Do you find it fascinating that the religious leaders were more concerned about being upstaged than they were that a man who claimed to be the Son of God whom they had crucified, really did resurrect?

The reason I wanted you to hear that passage is that *Jesus Christ is the Victor*!

He took the worst humanity could deliver, and satisfied the divine righteousness of God by becoming the Passover lamb that takes (notice the present tense) takes away the sins of the world! And if the story would have ended there, we would be no better off than the Jews who needed the Temple to continuously offer sacrifices for their sins. But because Jesus Christ is the Victor over death and the grave that changes everything. His once-and-done sacrifice has given us all the grace we need. And more than grace, we share his victory, so sin and death no longer have any power over us. *Jesus Christ – the Victor*!

**Raisin’ the Bar Challenge**

So in Christ we not only have a Savior who by his atoning death on a cross frees us from the punishment we deserve for our sinfulness and commutes our sentence to hell, but we also have a Victor! A Victor who on our behalf has done battle with the powers of evil that want to keep us mired in our sinfulness.

Evil itself has been defeated by *Jesus Christ, the Victor*, and through his Holy Spirit, he continues to journey with us giving us his very power to continue his victory. If we let it, it guides and directs our every action so that through the living of our days we can give him the praise and glory and honor he is due!

**Prayer**

God, our Heavenly Father, we give you thanks and praise for the faithfulness of your Son and our Lord Jesus. He faithfully went to the cross and died in our place so that when our days are done we *can* enter into your presence. Until you call us home, remind us daily, that it pleases you when we live our lives according to his example. We pray this in the name of our Risen Lord Jesus Christ, and all God's people agreed and said, Amen.