

O God, through the humiliation and exaltation of Your Son You have raised up Your people from this fallen world. Grant to Your faithful people, rescued from the peril of everlasting death, perpetual gladness in the midst of a world overwhelmed by sadness; through Jesus Christ, our Lord who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Now when [Jesus] rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons. She went and told those who had been with Him, as they mourned and wept. But when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it. After these things He appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country. And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them. Afterward He appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and He rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw Him after He had risen. And He said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

In Christ Jesus, who is the One who ended our perpetual night of sadness by raising us up in our new day of eternal gladness, dear fellow redeemed:

Have you ever thought it strange that the angels at the empty tomb and Jesus Himself told the women to inform the disciples that Jesus would see them in Galilee, but they stayed in Jerusalem for at least eight more days? Jesus would appear to them on Easter evening in Jerusalem in the locked room and again a week later in that same place. They did not immediately go to Galilee as Jesus had instructed them. What kept them from going? Their unbelieving fears petrified them. Jesus would eventually appear before them in Galilee, but in loving compassion He would accommodate their fears and appear to them in Jerusalem. They were paralyzed with fear and overwhelmed in their grief. As we consider our text let us observe what it means for us today that **Without Faith in the Resurrection, Grief Becomes Overwhelming.**

### I

So when "Mary Magdalene ... went and told those who had been with [Jesus], as they mourned and wept [that the risen Lord had appeared to her]. ... they heard that He was alive ..., they would not believe it. After [this, Jesus] appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking [on the road to Emmaus]. And they went back

and told the rest, but [once again] they did not believe them. The same response was given to the report of the other women who also had seen the risen Lord that morning.

When Jesus finally appears to the disciples in the locked room, He rebukes them “for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw Him after He had risen.” Would you not think this would be such good news that they would jump with joy upon hearing it? But their hearts were too hardened with grief that they could not bring themselves to believe what Jesus had been telling them for a long time – that the Son of man would be arrested, crucified, die and would rise again on the Third Day.

From our perspective as believers today, we find it strange that those doubt-filled disciples did not snap out of their grief immediately and welcome Jesus back with open arms. But we are not living in that hate-filled community of Jerusalem as they had been. They had just observed a week of their duplicitous religious leaders saying and doing things against their dear Lord Jesus. Hearing reports of these spotty appearances would seem too good to be true and were they just cruel tricks of those who hated Jesus.

In their overwhelming grief denying the credibility of a dead person raising himself back to life, their hearts were slow to be raised up in hope. The significance of Jesus’ resurrection for them as sinners was not having an impact upon them yet. Again they were living in the midst of those who seemed in control with all their wickedness. A raised Jesus would still be vulnerable, they probably thought, to those who sought and achieved having Him crucified. Why could all these things not happen all over again? If Jesus could not, would not stop it in the first place, why would it be any different now?

## II

It would take weeks for Jesus’ followers to have doubt cast out from their hearts and have the significance of His resurrection sink in for them. Just as the significance of the crucifixion was not readily understood to be good news, so it would be the same in regard to the resurrection. Do you think those who lived through all this called the day Jesus died – “Good Friday” from the start? It would only be understood with blessing in the pouring out of the Holy Spirit that would happen in about seven weeks.

Here is what the Holy Spirit would lead these Apostles to come to know and trust and pass on to the Church through their inspired writings:

- The resurrection of Christ definitely proves that Christ is the

- Son of God who had power over His own death;
- Jesus made full satisfaction for all our sins to the acceptance of the Father in heaven;
- Jesus will raise His believers to life on His day of reappearing;
- It gives the believer in Jesus strength to forsake sin and live a new life free from the guilt of sin and its condemnation.

Jesus' resurrection was not that Jesus just lives another day to fight on against His enemies, but rather to give us life right now. The battle of Life against Death was complete and victorious when Jesus, the crucified One, rose from the dead.

When this good news or as we more commonly refer to it – the Gospel, is believed and understood, Christians naturally go out to proclaim it to all those God places in their lives. It is Good News for all people in the created world, since all are sinners. This resurrected Redeemer of the world not only suffered and died for their sins, but rose from the dead to justify all people before the Father in heaven.

Through us His Church, Jesus calls all people to believe in Him as the Savior. As the Church proclaims the Gospel and baptizes in the same Gospel power, sinners dead in their sin are made alive and are saved. They are pulled out of their overwhelming grief found in this world of sin and death. But conversely, those who do not believe in the resurrected Lord Jesus are eternally condemned in their sin. Their grief will be oppressive forever.

Are you living as one who has been rescued from the overwhelming grief of life in this world filled with all sorts of disappointing twists and turns, caused by your own sin and the sin of others? Or do you find yourself increasingly oppressed by the gloom and doom of death in this world?

We read in our Gospel lesson for today that when Jesus appeared to His disciples that first Easter evening, He gave them this promise: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.” This is the power of Christ's resurrection given to His Church. The weight of sin is measured by its guilt, shame and condemnation and as death looms over the sinner, it becomes overwhelming. Unbelief knows no good news of rescue and salvation. It finds the weight of sin increasingly oppressive, especially as its many forms of escape disappear and a sense of mortality begins to sink in.

Now again we might observe that the chief priests and elders were not in hiding, cowering with the weight of their grief oppressing them at the time of our text. Their consciences may have

been somewhat troubled after the report of the guards. But they would rely on their plots and schemes as before, so that just as they had plotted to kill Lazarus after he had been raised, it would take little they thought to do the same with Jesus. However in seven weeks, after hearing Peter's Pentecost sermon many of them were cut to the heart and pleaded for help from the Apostles, realizing they had called for the Lord's Christ to be crucified. Their grief at that point was overwhelming, but the Apostles told them to be baptized in the name of Jesus and be forgiven. Over three thousand were baptized that day. The resurrected Lord through His Church brings relief for sinners like you and me.

We get to speak the word of forgiveness based on Jesus' life, death and resurrection to one another. We gather here regularly to have that oppressive weight lifted from off of us. Tomorrow looks much differently for us as sinners when we believe and trust that all our sins are forgiven by the very One who has been grievously offended by our sin. Our Creator God has done this for us. Yes, we will very likely come upon new grief tomorrow or the coming week reminding us that we live in a broken world. But we live in His kingdom through the Gospel. Life, eternal life, is ours now for the sake of the work of our crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ.

My fellow believers in the Living Jesus, by believing you have life in His name with all your sins forgiven, go now into your various corners of the world in the peace of believing in Him who resolves all your grief forevermore. Amen.