

O Lord Jesus Christ, You have gone to the Father to prepare a place for us *having sent us Your Spirit who has raised us to life through Your life-giving Word*: Grant us so to live in communion with You here on earth, *that we may hear Your voice anew in our second resurrection* so that hereafter we may enjoy the fullness of Your presence *forevermore*; You who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (*Parish Prayers, ed. Frank Colquhoun, p. 89*)

[Jesus said:] "The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so He has granted the Son also to have life in Himself. And He has given him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment."

In Christ Jesus, who came to give the dead life, dear fellow redeemed:

We were conceived and born into this life dead in our trespasses and sins. Spiritually we were dead and needed to be born again. Otherwise when our bodies would eventually die, we would face the second death of body and soul in the everlasting fires of hell. Jesus came so that we might pass from death to life. He describes this blessed process in our text. So consider this for your comfort today: **Having Experienced the First Resurrection, Fear Not the Second.**

I

While you and I, sinners that we are, have death abiding in us from the moment of conception, God sent His Son, born of the Virgin so that He might have life in Himself, not death. You see, the generational cycle of inherited sin and death from Adam was broken when the Virgin conceived this Holy Child by the Holy Spirit. Death passed on generation after generation since Adam, but God the Father sent His Son into the world without death abiding in Him, so that He might give us, the dead, life.

How this works is really not all that complicated; incredible, yes, but not complex. In truth it is so simple that many reject it based on its simplicity. The Everlasting Father sent His holy Son to live the perfect life in this world required of each one of us and sacrificed it unto death for us all. The Father takes from us our sins which would

separate us from Him for all eternity in that second death and gives it to His Son. His Son is able to endure it all for you and me and for the whole world of sinners from Adam to the last sinner conceived into this world. Christ Jesus was able to bear the full eternal punishment, the second death of hell, for us all and then rise to life.

But sadly as Jesus observes: “Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.” And then will rise in the resurrection as “those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.” You know you have done evil, so why do you not need to fear that resurrection and be in this group? By God’s grace you have been raised in a first resurrection, having heard the voice of the Savior by the working of the Spirit and you have been born anew.

As Jesus says elsewhere: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.” First of all, those who believe in Jesus as the Son sent by the Father to be the sinners’ holy Substitute has death die in him or her and life, eternal life, abides within. But secondly, the one who does not believe in Jesus as the Savior sent by God, must personally answer for his or her own sin; and having no answer for even one sin, that person has death remaining within as a result of God’s wrath abiding forever.

II

So hear these blessed words of our Lord again and know they apply to you my fellow believers in Christ: “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.” Yes, you were among the dead having been conceived and born into this world by sinful parents, but you have now been raised to life by the living and powerful Word of Christ.

Based on this truth you have no reason to fear your second resurrection as Jesus said: “an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life.” But it is difficult for you and me confidently to identify with those words – “those who have done good”, because we repent of our evil deeds, words and thoughts every day.

But this very repentance is a sign of the first resurrection. Those in whom death still abides do not repent. Oh, they may feel remorse, like Judas after realizing what he had done, but it was only worldly

sorrow. Your repentance is godly sorrow and is a Spirit-wrought repentance and shows you already passed from death to life.

You do not and will not come into judgment; there is therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Take Jesus' word for it. He spells it out quite plainly. And keep this in mind: "The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father." You honor the Son rightly by believing His Word declaring you to be right and holy.

So on the one hand, at this time of the church year we contemplate the Day of Judgment, but on the other, we hear and believe the good news of how our Lord Jesus has answered all the righteous demands of justice for us and cleansed us from all unrighteousness. In Christ you are accounted as one of those who have done good ready to enter life everlasting as confessed in the Athanasian Creed. Jesus was hungry and you fed Him, thirsty and you gave Him drink, etc. – much to your surprise.

Our Gospel lesson for today is the clear accounting of what we shall experience on that day when our bodies will be raised, if dead; and transformed, if still living. Judgment will be meted out upon the entire human race. But the very first words which come from our Lord's mouth to us who believe in Him are these: "Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Where are the frightening words of judgment? They are nowhere to be found in that opening statement of the appointed Judge.

Notice, the opening statement is not even a question for us. It is a sweet invitation and a purely positive proclamation of gift to us. Your verdict is that you are found to be righteous in all your acts of love to neighbor. Your "sentence", if you will, is eternal life. Ever since you heard the voice of the Lord Jesus, for many of you already in infancy at your baptisms, you have been raised to new life. The old has gone; the new has come. So the second command to rise to life will be truly familiar to you. John writes in the revelation he received from our Lord: "Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power."

By the gracious working of your Lord, you will not experience the second death because you already experienced the first resurrection in this life. Believers in Christ get to experience one death and two resurrections. Unbelievers experience one resurrection, but two deaths. Two resurrections equal eternal life. Two deaths equal everlasting death. God be praised that we will have heard the voice of the Savior raising us to life twice.

Because you have experienced the first resurrection, having heard the voice of the Lord awaken you to faith with His Word of life, you too can join Luther in his simple believer's prayer as one of the raised holy ones of God faithfully awaiting His loud command at the second resurrection:

**You, my Lord Jesus, are my righteousness, I am Your sin.
You have taken from me what is mine
And have given me what is Yours.
You became what You were not
And made me to be what I was not.**

This is the catholic (small "c") faith; whoever faithfully and firmly believes this will be saved. Amen.