

Heavenly Father, You delivered Your Son for our offenses and raised Him for our justification. Grant that we may also trust in the word of forgiveness, which You have given Your *Church* to proclaim, that clinging to Your good and gracious promises, we might be brought to eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Luther's Small Catechism: with Explanation, CPH 2017 p. 321)

[Paul continued speaking to the Jews in Antioch] For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption, but He whom God raised up did not see corruption. Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this Man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by Him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. Beware, therefore, lest what is said in the Prophets should come about: "'Look, you scoffers, be astounded and perish; for I am doing a work in your days, a work that you will not believe, even if one tells it to you.'" As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath.

In Christ Jesus, who defied death by being raised from the dead incorruptible, dear fellow redeemed:

It was a mark of God's prophets that their words often fell on deaf ears. Repeatedly they warned their hearers about their all too often dismissive attitudes toward what was being told them by God Himself. Paul was addressing the Jews in Antioch in Pisidia upon the urging of the synagogue rulers. It was received well that Sabbath, but by the next Sabbath word had spread to the Gentiles and many of the Jews became jealous and spoke out against Paul and his message.

You might remember Stephen, with Paul himself in the crowd of his enemies and executioners, made the same point to them when he said: "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One ..." Paul, as an unbelieving Pharisee at that time, would have a change of heart and his ears would be miraculously opened with the sweet words of forgiveness from his Lord on the road to Damascus.

So Paul had first-hand knowledge of this deadly rejection of the truth of the resurrected Lord Jesus. Therefore at the beginning of his first missionary journey he trusted the power of that word of forgiveness through the crucified and risen Lord Jesus. We too are still committed to declaring this powerful Word of salvation, because

we too from all sorts of backgrounds have personally come to know that **Jesus' Unbelievable Death Defying Work Empowers Forgiveness.**

I

One of the greatest heroes of faith for the Jews was King David. God declared that he was a man after His own heart and blessed him with victory upon victory. But it could not be denied that "after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, [he] fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption." As great as David was among God's people, he remained a sinner and met the ravages of death in his body placed in the grave.

You, my fellow sinners, may not be as weak as a believer as Thomas in our Gospel lesson, since you believe what you cannot see. Perhaps you are not even as weak in your faith in Jesus' resurrection as were the other disciples who thought they were seeing a ghostly image of Jesus. You know and trust that Jesus rose from the dead with His body completely intact. But as even David experienced, your sinful flesh too must receive its just wage, death and your body if put in the grave before Jesus returns for judgment will see corruption. Decomposition will happen, no matter how effective your regime of organic dieting and your vigorous exercising routines are.

While Jesus succumbed to our death, His perfect body was death defying. Whereas our bodies immediately begin the process of decomposition, Jesus' body did not. He allowed Himself to die to be sure, but only to defeat death for you and me and all sinners. Death could not destroy our perfect Substitute as hard as it tried. Grave clothes that bound his body, head to foot - a sealed grave enclosing His body with a Roman guard standing watch could not hold Him. Not even locked doors and windows could keep the death defying body of our Lord from appearing in all His glory before the disciples two Sundays in a row.

II

Unbelievable? - to be sure, by human reason. But a greater power than sinful human reason is at work through the message of the risen Christ for sinful mankind. After Paul noted the corruptible nature of David's body, he went on to observe "He whom God raised up did not see corruption. Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this Man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by Him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses."

Early in the first book of Moses, we read that if humans sinned they would surely die and that after sin came God declared to them

that from dust they were and to dust they would return. That is how it's been working for us sinners ever since. However, these laws from Moses and all the rest no longer bind the sinner who believes in the incorruptible living Savior, Jesus Christ.

Is it because faith is such a great work on the part of the sinner that you now deserve to be forgiven of all your sin by God? Not at all! Rather sin and death had no claim on our perfect Substitute. By rising incorruptible the Father declares all sin forgiven. As that word of forgiveness goes out, the Spirit empowers it to give to the sinner, like you, the very thing it declares, engendering and keeping faith in your hearts.

You have come to expect this every time you gather here around Word and Sacrament. Just as the hearers of Paul in our text responded, they "begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath", so you also return to hear this again and again on the Lord's Day and even on other occasions. You give generously as God has prospered you, so that this soul liberating word might be declared to you and others in your own community and beyond.

But as mentioned earlier some who seemed so eager for Paul and Barnabas to return the next week were turned off because others, whom they judged to be less worthy of God's grace, were turning out in great numbers. They became jealous when the Gentiles responded enthusiastically. Jesus was a Jew. Paul was a Jew. These unbelievable things they heard about this *new Jewish hero* should be a matter of nationalistic pride, not shared with others with a different ancestry.

Who do you think is less deserving than you of this word of forgiveness in the risen Lord Jesus? - your godless pagan neighbor? - your neighbor who is a Mormon, Jehovah Witness, Buddhists, or Moslem? - your recalcitrant abusively sarcastic and mean relative? - the unbelieving co-worker against whom you are holding a grudge and have threatened never to forgive? What if one of these precious blood-bought souls, without any connection to your confession of Christ, becomes an excited believer in the Lord Jesus? Would you rejoice and give thanks to God for His miraculous working upon him/her as He has worked upon you? Or would you become suspicious, even jealous and downright resentful?

If you can identify any such evil thoughts over against another person, thinking yourself to be more worthy and deserving, know that Jesus paid for all such diabolical sins of yours. He also produced the pure righteous thoughts, words and deeds, which enabled Him to pray for His enemies, desiring for them to repent and believe, so that they may become joint heirs of everlasting life with Him.

It is unbelievable that your fiercest enemy, death, no longer has an everlasting claim on you. Your body will be raised on the last Day incorruptible for all eternity. The word of forgiveness and life has set you free from all the ravages of sin forever. Are you ready to hear this truth told to you with other words on the next Lord's Day? Sadly we will produce again this week thoughts, words and deeds of unrighteousness, but next week we will again be forgiven and credited with Jesus righteousness in abundance through Word and Sacrament. Unless, of course, your body will already be safely tucked away in your grave awaiting the great day when Jesus, with a shout, will perform the death defying act for you – raising you incorruptible. Amen.