**Christ Jesus Lay in**

**Death’s Strong Bands**

**LSB #458 & TLH #195**

Resurrection of our Lord

Easter Day – 04.04.2021

He is risen! (He is risen! Indeed! Alleluia!)

This is the fourth hymn of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther that has been used as a “hymn of the day” since Ash Wednesday. I know there are Easter hymns which may be more popular, but there is a richness of the text here that is incomparable.

This tune is also interesting. There is the hint of almost a militaristic march to it, lending itself to a triumphant attitude.

This hymn could, all by itself be a sermon. The richness of the text is astounding beautiful. It begins briefly stating Christ’s condition as of Good Friday – in death’s strong bands – because of our sinfulness. But death could not contain Him, He is now again where He had come from – at the Father’s right hand. And, the victory He has won, life eternal, He delivers to us.

It is not just His resurrection therefore that brings us joy, but what it means for us, that we now have eternal life. He resurrection brings us life, there is our joy! For that we should be thankful and sing loud, bold, songs of alleluia! (sing a rousing – alleluia)

*Christ Jesus lay in death’s strong bands, For our offenses given; But now at God’s right hand He stands, And brings us life from Heaven. Therefore let us joyful be,*

*And sing to God right thankfully Loud songs of Alleluia! Alleluia!*

In the next verse, unfortunately omitted in *The Lutheran Hymnal*, but thankfully restored in the *Lutheran Service Book*, we confess why this had to be, why Christ had to “lay in death’s strong bands” at all. Sinfulness has brought us all to the point of death, for there are none innocent. Death hold us all captive. It terrorizes us, boldly laying claim to us. From it we cannot free ourselves.

Too often, people like to blame the Jews, Pilate, and the Romans for nailing Christ to the cross and His suffering and death. Yes, they were the instruments used to accomplish the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, but you and I are as much the cause as they. Do you understand? Our sinfulness is the cause! Most do not want to consider their own sinfulness, they are “good people” after all. The truth?

*No son of man could conquer death, Such ruin sin had wrought us, No innocence was found on earth, And therefore death had brought us Into bondage from of old*

*And ever grew more strong and bold And held us as its captive. Alleluia!*

This third verse is also omitted in *TLH.* It is however a glorious Gospel response to the one preceding. It was because of our sinfulness and our captivity to it that God sent His only begotten Son.

I know, there are those who do not want to consider Good Friday on this Easter morn. But, if there were no death, there would be no resurrection. Just as people do not like to consider Good Friday on Christmas. But they are all intimately tied together.

God had to take on our human flesh. He had to live a perfect sinless life in our human flesh. And only then would He, as God enfleshed be a fit sacrifice – holy and spotless – to crush sin and destroy the claim it has upon us. Yes, maybe it is most fittingly, a bit of a militaristic tune.

*Christ Jesus, God’s own Son came down, His people to deliver, Destroying death He took the crown from death’s pale brow forever, Stripped of pow’r, no more it reigns; and empty form alone remain; Its sting is lost forever. Alleluia!*

This verse reminds me of the confrontation that takes place outside the town of Nain as that widow, whose only son had died, is leaving the city in funeral procession. Into Nain comes Christ. Death and the author of Life – the Conqueror of death – face off. Yes, a strange and dreadful strife.

Consider also the events of Christ’s passion. Seriously, how strange was that? God – who created and gave life to all that exists – has taken on human flesh of His creatures. He does this to defeat the enemy of life, death. But, to do this, He must surrender His life unto death, but not any death, death meted out upon Him in a shameful way, as One being punished for sin.

God dies for His creatures? God gives His life unto death that the creatures might live? God punishes His own Son for the disobedience of those of whom He expects obedience? Yes! Yes to all of it!

In this incredibly strange battle, the Lord of Life is victorious. In victory, He destroys death’s reign over humanity. There is no more power in death. Yes, we see the caskets of our loved ones, their bodies lowered into graves. We shed our tears, weeping for the pain of a loved one removed from our midst. But it is only with fleshly eyes that we perceive this. Christ rose from the grave! Death is conquered! We will see those who have gone before us, and we will embrace them, holding them with our own arms.

Yes…

*It was a strange and dreadful strife When life and death contended; The victory remained with life; The reign of death was ended. Stripped of power, no more it reigns, An empty form alone remains Death’s sting is lost forever! Alleluia!*

It is in the empty tomb that we see the truth. Yes, the Lamb was slain for us, He did die – out of His incredible love – to save you and me. We are now baptized into Him. Faith makes the sign of the cross, the blood of the Lamb of God marks the doorposts and lintel of our hearts – we are united to Christ, as He rose, so also shall we. We remember the blood of the myriad of lambs marking the doorposts and lintels so the angel of death passed over the Israelites.

*Here the true Paschal Lamb we see, Whom God so freely gave us; He died on the accursed tree— So strong His love!—to save us. See, His blood doth mark our door; Faith points to it, death passes over, And Satan cannot harm us. Alleluia!*

We are victorious in Christ. Let us rejoice this Holy Day, the day of Resurrection! Christ has risen and we too shall rise. Let our hearts rejoice, for the darkness of sin has been defeated. Those things which are daily grim reminders of our sinfulness are empty husks – failing eyes, ruined knees, spina bifida, cancer, multiple schlerosis, and any other evidences of sinfulness that may rear their ugly head in your life are just that. We know the truth of what is ours, eternally.

*So let us keep the festival Where to the Lord invites us; Christ is Himself the joy of all, The sun that warms and lights us. By His grace He doth impart Eternal sunshine to the heart; The night of sin is ended! Alleluia!*

When we gather with family to rejoice over some significant event, what do we always do? We eat! The more important the event in our minds, the greater the feast of celebration. What greater celebration could there be than that which is ours, the resurrection to new life that we have in Christ Jesus – resurrection to new life in Him today, and for eternity. It happens whenever we acknowledge and confess our sinfulness, putting to death the old Adam, the sinful nature – and trust that in Christ all is forgiven we rise to a new life – the resurrected life of Christ lived in us.

So, let us gather for the greatest feast. We come together and dine on the true bread of heaven, the very flesh of Christ. Sinfulness is purged from us. Christ feeds us, giving us to dine on the most holy food, Christ’s own body and blood. Faith lives upon nothing else.

Let us come to the feast! Let us dine on the Crucified One that we might be raised to new life. Let us celebrate Resurrection Day – His and ours, in Him!

With all pomp and circumstance, with joyous triumphant joy…

*Then let us feast this Easter day On the true bread of Heaven; The Word of grace hath purged away The old and wicked leaven. Christ alone our souls will feed;*

*He is our meat and drink indeed; Faith lives upon no other! Alleluia!*

He is Risen!

He is Risen, indeed! Alleluia. Amen.