

5th Sunday of Easter
Service of Daily Prayer -- Morning
May 2, 2021

P: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen.**

P: O Lord, open my lips,

C: **and my mouth will declare Your praise.**

Psalm 51:15

P: Make haste, O God, to deliver me;

C: **Make haste to help me, O Lord.**

Psalm 70:1

P: Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is good;

C: **for His steadfast love endures forever!**

Psalm 118:29

**All: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

Scripture Readings

Acts 8:26-40

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place. And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this:

"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter
and like a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he opens not his mouth.

In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth."

And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Revelation 20:1-15

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he

might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

John 15:1-8

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

Hymn: *LSB 525, Crown Him With Many Crowns*



1 Crown Him with man - y crowns, The Lamb up - on His throne;
2 Crown Him the vir - gin's Son, The God in - car - nate born,
3 Crown Him the Lord of love. Be - hold His hands and side,
4 Crown Him the Lord of life, Who tri - umphed o'er the grave
5 Crown Him the Lord of heav'n, En - throned in worlds a - bove,



Hark how the heav'n-ly an - them drowns All mu - sic but its own.
Whose arm those crim-son tro - phies won Which now His brow a-dorn:
Rich wounds, yet vis - i - ble a - bove, In beau - ty glo - ri - fied.
And rose vic - to - rious in the strife For those He came to save.
Crown Him the king to whom is giv'n The won-drous name of Love.



A - wake, my soul, and sing Of Him who died for thee, And
Fruit of the mys - tic rose, Yet of that rose the stem, The
No an - gels in the sky Can ful - ly bear that sight, But
His glo - ries now we sing, Who died and rose on high, Who
Crown Him with man - y crowns As thrones be - fore Him fall; Crown



hail Him as thy match-less king Through all e - ter - ni - ty.
root whence mer - cy ev - er flows, The babe of Beth - le - hem.
down-ward bend their won-d'ring eyes At mys - ter - ies so bright.
died e - ter - nal life to bring And lives that death may die.
Him, ye kings, with man - y crowns, For He is king of all.

Sermon

I think each different denomination or tradition within Christianity has its own unique quirks -- just like a big extended family, each branch or member has its little foibles. In our case, one of them is our attitude towards the devil. I'd guess most people don't think about Satan all that much, and these days a lot of people might even be tempted to think he's some kind of representation of evil instead of an actual being. But in our own tradition, there was a huge emphasis on the devil: think about that hymn "A Mighty Fortress," which is all about the powerful, evil foe we face in Satan, and how only Christ can defeat him for us.

For our forefathers in faith back in the 16th century, Satan was very real, a clear and present danger to Christians; as Peter says, a roaring lion prowling around to devour God's faithful. So today's reading from Revelation takes us to the same subject, and it gives us some very important and necessary information about him. And that is that he has been defeated, bound, imprisoned, his deceit restrained.

This is the direct result of Jesus, and what he accomplished at Calvary. Jesus himself speaks in a similar way; he describes the devil as a "strong man" who must be bound and plundered, and that he is the one who does this. He shows his power and carries out this mission as, time after time, he sets people free from Satan, casting out demons, forgiving sins, showing the authority he uses to bind the evil enemy. And during Holy Week, he said that Satan will be judged and driven out when Jesus is lifted up on the cross. The devil was bound, conquered, judged, and cast out by Jesus' ministry, culminating with his death and resurrection; this binding that Revelation describes is the victory of Christ on the cross.

You'd think that would be the end, the final act of Jesus. But even though Christians are confident in this victory, it hasn't fixed all the problems we face here and now. John also sees in his vision the oppression of God's people, those beheaded for their faith, those resisting the pressure of mankind's civilization to conform, the ongoing power of evil in the world -- from within our own corrupted nature, and from demonic forces outside of ourselves. Even during this time of Christ's triumph, even as we are confident in all Jesus has accomplished for us, still it's not all fun and games, being faithful to God in this world. But in the end, it's all going to be right: Jesus describes baptism and faith as being born again; here, John describes it as "the first resurrection."

Human beings, born physically alive but spiritually dead, are resurrected by the power of God in faith. "When you were dead in your sins," Colossians says, "God made you alive in Christ." This morning, Laura received this gift of God in Baptism, hearing and feeling the promise of life in Christ which is received by faith. We were dead in our sins, until God in his great love and rich mercy, made us alive with Christ -- it is by this grace that we have been saved. And it is because of this grace, this faith, this gift of God, that John writes "Blessed and holy is the one who shares [in this]! Over such [people] the second death has no power." Over those who have been born again of water and the spirit, earthly death has no power. We have died once already, buried right here with Christ in baptism; we have been resurrected once already, raised with him to live a new life. This is nothing more than re-stating Romans 6.

There's a great promise that goes with those who have joined Jesus in this first resurrection of Baptism and faith. In the end, all these enemies will be banished to the lake of fire, nothing left to afflict or attack the Church. Part of what John saw has already happened -- the victory of Christ, our spiritual death and resurrection through being joined with Christ in baptism -- but part of it is still yet to come. He also describes what we'd call "the Judgment Day," and it's almost the exact same vision that Daniel described hundreds of years earlier. All the dead are raised, and every person who has ever lived is brought before the throne of God, and it says "books were opened."

What are these books? It says that these are records of what everyone has done in life. Now, for sinners like us, those are terrifying words. Our own brains already have a tendency to replay for us some of our most embarrassing moments or biggest mistakes. Can you imagine a record of every one of those things? I can't imagine the size of that library, but in any case, the real point is that God's knowledge is total and complete, that He knows everything that was ever done. And these are the books presented at the Day of Judgment.

What have you done that you thought was secret and unknown? What have you thought but never dared speak? What long-buried, long-forgotten mistakes lie in your past? God knows them all. He knows them even better than you do. We know the consequences of sin: the wages of sin is death, and if we honestly reflect on all those things we desperately try to put out of our minds or hide away, we cannot help but be ashamed and hopeless.

And if we were judged according to our works, if we were judged before the throne of God on the Last Day according to what's found in these books which record what we've done, there would be no hope. Our performance review could only conclude we've failed miserably. But that is not what Scripture says will happen; that is not what Revelation describes. We praise God that it's never been about being "good enough" because we know none of us ever could measure up! There's another book, and it is called the "book of life"; that one is the deciding factor. The verdict in this judgment relies only on that one thing, whether or not a person's name is found in that one single Book of Life.

It's a theme we see in different parts of Scripture. In the Old Testament, righteous people are described as being on the roll for God, while the names of the unrighteous are missing. We see it in Ezekiel. We see it in the Psalms. We see it in Daniel. Paul mentions it in Philippians. And of course, Jesus himself cautions his followers not to be prideful about their spiritual authority: "Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." God knows everything we've thought or said or done... but all that matters being alive in Christ. The only ones who are sent into this second death are those whose names are not found in the Book of Life.

It's a sobering warning for those who may be absent, that physical death is followed by spiritual death. It's hard to think about, especially when we care about people who are outside of the Christian faith. But it's also an enormous comfort for us and those who have already been buried and raised with Christ by faith, never to die again. Rejoice, because your names are written in the Book of Life, and in the end that is all that matters. Because of your first resurrection in Baptism, there will never be a second, spiritual death.

It's been said that the promises of the Gospel are both "now" and "not yet," that we already experience right now in this life so many of the benefits and assurances of Christ: peace with God, forgiveness, the power of the Holy Spirit for a changed life, truly being different from the unbelieving world around us. But there are also things that still lie in the future, in the "not yet" time frame: the end of all the difficulties of living in this world, the things that work against us, our own nature which still stumbles and falls, all the heartaches of continuing to exist in a broken world. Both "now" and "not yet."

This passage, this vision of John's in Revelation, gives us both side by side. Even now, Jesus has defeated the power of Satan. Even now, we are blessed and holy by sharing in this first resurrection, this spiritual re-birth in Jesus. Even now, we know the second death has no power. And yet, for now, there is still persecution against God's people, suffering and temptation. For now, the power of evil still makes threats against God's holy Church.

But we also see in this passage the "not yet." All those powers of evil will be totally wiped away, never to afflict God's people again. All tears and causes of suffering will be ended. The devil, all evil in the world, and even death itself are thrown away and locked away. The peace with God we now know in our hearts will be spread across all Creation. The dead will all be raised, the second resurrection when we will be reunited with all those who have gone before us in faith and will live together in God's restored Creation with no end.

What matters is Christ. His name is written on you in Baptism, as the name of the holy Triune God was just placed on Laura this morning: the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And your name was written with him as one who belongs to Jesus. Death may threaten in this world, but you are safe; Jesus takes care of his own. Satan may try to deceive, and in fact Revelation suggests that through the course of human history (though we cannot know or accurately guess at the timing) it will get worse before it gets better. But you are safe in Christ. You are forgiven and at peace with God; nothing matters but knowing Him, your name found with Him in the Book of Life and His name placed on you by grace, through faith. It doesn't matter who you are or what you've done. It matters whose you are and what He has done.

Lord's Prayer

**Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be Thy name,
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth
as it is in heaven;
give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom
and the power and the glory
forever and ever. Amen.**

C: Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

P: O God, You make the minds of Your faithful to be of one will. Grant that we may love what You have commanded and desire what You promise, that among the many changes of this world our hearts may be fixed where true joys are found; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C: **Amen.**

All: I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

P: Let us bless the Lord!

C: **Thanks be to God!**

P: The almighty and merciful Lord, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, bless and preserve you.

C: **Amen.**