

Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed!

Today we are celebrating the resurrection of our Lord:
We are celebrating *his* victory over death,
His victory over the grave.
And today I am proclaiming the Good News from God's word,
That the resurrection, that began on the first Easter Sunday,
Is the beginning of that great reign of Christ,
That will see not only the defeat of death,
But also our own resurrection into life with God.

Here's how today's reading begins: **If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.**

St Paul starts off by making the point that our hope in Christ
Is not for what can be gained in this fallen world.
In fact, by living with hope in Christ,
We let go of getting our own way in this world:
We let go of making money and possessions
The most important thing in life;
We let go of making status, or bodily pleasure,
Or even the close bonds of family life
The most important thing in life.

So seen in terms of getting what this world can give,
Living with hope in Christ can seem like a pitiable thing:
If we all end up in the grave and that's the end of existence,
Then we'd be foolish to live as if there's something more,
And we'd be especially foolish to give up worldly things,
If this fallen world is all that there is.

But St Paul goes on to make it clear
That our hope in Christ is by no means for this world only:
Through his resurrection we are called into something
Far greater than this world has to offer.
This is what St Paul says: **But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.**
It's not just that Christ has risen from the dead,
Showing that death does not have the final say in life.
It's also that Christ's resurrection

Is a guarantee of our own resurrection.

Now, St Paul uses the language of first fruits,
Language that comes from the Old Testament,
Where God's people would bring the first part of the harvest
As a gift to the Lord.

In doing this they acknowledged that the harvest
Was provided by God,
And they also expressed their hope that the rest of the harvest
Would follow.

But here *Christ himself* is the first fruits:
He is the first offering to the Father,
And the guarantee that the rest of the resurrection harvest is to follow.

So, as Christian people, we can understand that Jesus' resurrection
Is just the beginning of the great work of resurrection
That God is doing to restore this fallen world,
And to order well all things under Christ,
So that, as St Paul says at the end of this chapter of 1 Corinthians,
God will be all in all.

Jesus' resurrection is just the beginning
Of the great work of resurrection, that will include you,
As you put your hope in the one who has taken your sins on himself.

In fact, St Paul then goes on to draw the connection between
The reality of human sin, and the hope we have in Christ.
Listen to what he says: **For since death came through a human being, the
resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in
Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ.**

As human beings we have a sad solidarity with Adam,
With whom we together fell into sin that naturally makes us
Fearful of God, and unwilling to trust him:
We're descendants of Adam, made of the same flesh and blood,
And have a unity with him that takes us to death.

But, St Paul is saying, through faith in Christ Jesus
We have are *made alive* in him: we have a union with the human being
Who does not drag us down into death,
But who lifts us up into the resurrection.

St Paul now pictures a great and well ordered victory parade,
Which is led by Christ, and where everything and everyone

Has a place given to them by the same God
Who unifies all his creation in love.

This is what St Paul says: **But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.**

The beginning of God's victory over death starts with Jesus:

It starts with his resurrection from the dead,

And his ascension to the right hand of the Father.

Then, following in Jesus' footsteps, we follow,

We, who belong to Christ,

Not because we have somehow earned God's favour,

But because we trust that he has dealt with us mercifully,

Because we place our hope in Christ Jesus,

The Lamb of God, who has taken away the sins of the world.

Then St Paul, in case we think that reality is summed up,

By our own small part in God's creation,

Expands the meaning of the resurrection out to a cosmic scale,

He says: Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

That word 'end' in Greek doesn't just mean the finish,

It means the *goal*: just like the *end* of an acorn is an oak tree.

The *goal* of Jesus' death and resurrection

Is the establishment of Jesus' kingdom,

Where all those forces that oppose God,

And that oppose our true flourishing as human beings,

Are destroyed,

And where all things are put under his feet,

Where all things are subject to his good and gracious will.

St Paul brings his argument to a crescendo with these words:

The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

From Adam on death has loomed over human existence:

Death, not just as the end of life,

Something that must be endured by all living things,

From trees to ants, from birds to everything

That grows or moves or breathes,

But death as we experience it *as human beings*:

Death as something that we can anticipate,

That casts a pall over the whole of existence,

That frustrates our plans and pleasures,

That robs us of those we love,

That mocks us in our grief,
And that adds dread to our guilt and shame,
This enemy, *this* death, St Paul proclaims
Will be finally defeated by the one
Whose resurrection is the beginning of the great march of victory,
The procession of which we are part,
As we put our hope in Jesus.

If our hope in Christ were only for what we could gain in this world,
We would be worthy objects of pity:
We would be trapped in a delusion
That would keep us from seeing the world as it is;
We would be denying ourselves those things
Which, although they all lead to death,
Are all the world has to offer.

But God, through the Gospel, opens our eyes to reality:
Christ Jesus is the first fruits of the resurrection:
He is the guarantee of the resurrection to which God has called us.
Christ is the new and greater Adam,
Who does not bind us in the sad solidarity of death,
But who will make us alive in the kingdom of God.
And Christ is our true and victorious champion,
Who is taking all those forces opposed to God,
And opposed to our own flourishing,
Captive to his power, so that even that great enemy, Death,
Will itself die,
And we will live with him,
Who lives and reigns at the right hand of the Father,
With the Holy Spirit, one God,
Now and forever. Amen!

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