

Easter Vigil Sermon
March 26, 2016
John 20:1-18
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Dear children of God,

Our resurrected Lord and Savior Jesus Christ spoke to Mary that early Sunday morning, “Stop clinging to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” With these words Christ teaches us the great benefit we receive from his resurrection from the dead.

Christ refers to his disciples as *brothers*. Christ Jesus is truly our brother in the flesh. He is a man, born of the Virgin Mary. When he died, he died a man. When he rose from the dead, he remained a man. Today, Christ Jesus is still a man, sharing our flesh and blood. Yet, when Jesus refers to the disciples as his brothers, he means more than to confess the perpetuity of his incarnation. Christ’s designation of his disciples as brothers is *relational*. Jesus is declaring a good relationship—a repaired relationship.

We heard last night of the cup of God’s wrath, which Jesus consumed to the very last dregs. Christ was wounded for *our* transgressions; crushed for *our* iniquities. God laid on Jesus the iniquities of us all. In the suffering of Christ we see God’s anger toward sin, *our* sin. And we see the innocent Lamb of God, Jesus, bear the entire impact of that righteous anger. As Christ’s lifeless body is lowered from the cross, limp, pierced, and covered in stripes, the stanza of that haunting Good Friday hymn pierces the conscience:

O child of woe: Who struck the blow

That killed our gracious Master?

“It was I,” thy conscience cries,

“I have wrought disaster!” (LSB 448, O Darkest Woe)

Yet early that Sunday morning, the same Christ stands alive and calls those who struck the blow his brothers! This is the first lesson in Christ's words, "Christ's resurrection reconciles us to him." Jesus is our brother! Jesus living and breathing proves that the punishment he bore put away all hatred. Christ does not resent you or me or anyone for the wounds he bore. Rather he rejoices that his stripes healed us, and his blood washed us clean. You who hear this message of reconciliation and believe that he truly is your dear brother, are Christ's brother, sister, and mother (Matt. 12:48).

Christ must return to his Father, yet he tells his disciples that he is *their* Father. Again, this is a relational term. God the Father is *our* Father through faith. We are his *dear* children. This is proven to us through Christ's resurrection. It was the will of God the Father to crush Christ. He laid our iniquities on Christ. It was his will that caused Christ to drink the cup of wrath and judgment, even when he pleaded in the garden for it to be taken away. Christ's resurrection proves that the wrath of God that burned so hotly on Friday is completely satisfied forever. Christ's death makes full satisfaction for our sins.

Our sins separate us from God. They make it impossible for us to be his children. So Christ removes that great chasm that stood between us and God, through his blood on the cross. Christ's resurrection is a declaration by God that all our sins are forgiven. God accepts the payment. Your sins are atoned for. When Jesus tells his disciples that he is going to his Father and their Father, he is saying he is going ahead of them to their heavenly home to get things set for them.

Jesus says he is going to his God and their God. God is God no matter what. Whether you believe in Christ or not, God remains the Creator of the heavens and the earth and the judge of all souls. Yet to have him as *your* God means you have a good relationship with him. He isn't a scary, impersonal force. He's not a cruel taskmaster. He's your Savior, your God, one you can fear and love and trust in. Jesus returns to the God, who loves you.

This statement of Christ teaches to confess what St. Paul said in Romans chapter 4, "[Righteousness] will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who

was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.” Justification is the act of being justified. To be justified is to be declared in a right relationship with God. Sins, iniquities, trespasses put us in a bad relationship with God. Yet Christ was delivered up to death for our trespasses. And the fact that he is risen from the dead, means that our trespasses are no more. Our sins do not stand between us and God. You are *justified*. You are in a right relationship with God. Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is your brother. You belong to the same heavenly household. God the Father is *your* Father. He sees no spot or wrinkle in you, no fault or sin, because Christ has taken away every reproach from your soul. God is not only the one and only God, the almighty Sovereign of Heaven. God is *your* God. He listens to and answers *your* prayers. He loves you. He joins you to himself through Jesus and does not cast you off.

Jesus’ first words after triumphing over death and the grave are words of reconciliation. They are words of justification to all sinners. By Jesus’ work, not your, you have a right and good relationship with God. This is proven without a doubt by Christ’s resurrection.

Christ is risen. He is risen indeed, alleluia! And he lives forever to be your access to your Father and your God.

Amen.