2012_04_08 (Resurrection Sunday) Sermon – Ascension Batavia

Jesus lives! The victory's won! Death no longer can appall me; Jesus lives! Death's reign is done! From the grave Christ will recall me. Brighter scenes will then commence; This shall be my confidence.

Grace, peace, and Christ's victory to you. Amen.

You probably smelled bacon wafting in through the entry way when you arrived. Raise your hand if you are hungry. Scrambled eggs, fruit, bread, juice – we wait with anticipation. And yet, how long will the brunch satisfy your hunger? For our kids it is usually about 2-3 hours and they are asking for a snack.

Today we are given a feast to satisfy you greatest cravings. Today God invites you to a feast that will never run out. God celebrates the resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. He celebrates His victory over death. We pray that the Spirit would bless us today with a hunger not for the food of this world, but with an appetite for the greater feast that is to come – the Feast of Victory.

Isaiah 25:6-9 (NKJV)

6 And in this mountain The Lord of hosts will make for all people A feast of choice pieces, A feast of wines on the lees, Of fat things full of marrow, Of well-refined wines on the lees. **7** And He will destroy on this mountain The surface of the covering cast over all people, And the veil that is spread over all nations. **8** He will swallow up death forever, And the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces; The rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth; For the Lord has spoken. **9** And it will be said in that day: "Behold, this is our God; We have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the Lord; We have waited for Him; We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation."

THE FEAST OF VICTORY

In Jesus Name, the name at which every knee will bow, dear victorious believers,

1. Reason for the feast - death destroyed.

There are 3 weddings coming up in the lives of members in our congregation. Plans are underway. For one of these couples the day is drawing very near. For another the day is still aways off. How much planning needs to be done often depends on the hopes and dreams of the bride. Is this something she has pictured in her mind since she was five? A wedding gives us a good reason for a banquet celebration. It is perhaps one of the few ancient traditions that has hung on in some form since the time of Christ.

In fact, on several occasions Jesus related the kingdom of God to a weeding banquet. For instance, in Matthew 22, Jesus says, "The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son," (Matthew 22:2) ... "... he sent out other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding." " (Matthew 22:4) God has good reason to describe heaven in such terms. He does not picture us floating on clouds with golden harps in our hands. Rather in the rich, tasty terms of our text, it pictures a celebration, a banquet, a feast of victory.

What Jesus is saying that there is good reason to rejoice! There is reason to kill the fatted cattle. There is reason for the king to serve up His best feast.

We read from Isaiah, 6 And in this mountain The Lord of hosts will make for all people A feast of choice pieces ... 7 ... He will destroy on this mountain The surface of the covering cast over all people, And the veil that is spread over all nations.

Death is pictured as a blanket covering over all people. Why is it that we cover up dead bodies? I'll never forget the first funeral I can remember. I thought how strange it was that the body was dressed up, with make up on the face. Why do we cover up death? We certainly don't place the dead on display. Once life has left the body it begins to rapidly decay. The corpse becomes cold. It looses color. We cover it up because death is not pretty.

Death: the veil separates us from God. And no man, woman, or child is excluded. It is called "the covering cast over all people." As the Spirit records in Romans 5 – "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—" (Romans 5:12)

We see the root cause. ... Sin. All have sinned, therefore, all are dead – dead in sins, separated from God. For that is the true enemy of the living God: sin and death. That is the veil that covers all mankind. Death separates us from God – beginning with our souls at conception, ending with our bodies in eternity.

Every time we fail to live according to His will we must be kept separate. As long as this veil lies over a person, he or she is forever shrouded in darkness. This veil is what keeps us captive to sin and fear. This separation let's us go on thinking about me first, blind to those around us, blind to God our Creator, relying on ourselves to fix this problem, relying on our works, our good living to make things right with God. But because of our sinful nature, never could we pierce that shroud.

For anything to be done with the veil, it had to come from above, from outside the veil. Even with all mankind working together to lift this covering, it would not budge. We remain covered in sins. So God sent something did come from above – from the other side of that veil. Only Jesus, perfectly holy – the sinless Son of God – could change your destiny. As Peter says on the day of Pentecost: **24** whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it. (Acts 2:23-24).

It was not possible that He could be held by the pains of death. "who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification." (Romans 4:25) His resurrection was because we have been declared not guilty. That is, because Good Friday was the sufficient payment, Jesus rose. The resurrection proves the victory God has given you in Christ. He swallowed up death forever. "So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men." (Romans 5:18) Jesus' journey to the cross was just that – one, complete and perfect act of righteousness. In place of every sin you've committed, in place of the sentence of death that was against you has come one perfect act of righteousness bringing to you life. Nothing now separates you from God. In God's eyes, you are holy and living. In our Savior's resurrection God "swallowed up death forever." (v.8).

Maybe one of our brides has pictured her wedding day since she was 5. Well – God has pictured and planned this feast for you since eternity. He has reason to celebrate. You have reason to celebrate. Death is destroyed.

Let us now celebrate with <u>Hymn 198:1–3</u>.

2. Waiting for the feast – The Church militant.

Preparing for a wedding leaves much anticipation for the great day. We look forward to the celebration. And finally it arrives. The stress is relieved, the joy of the day is here. But what after? What happens when the honeymoon fades away? Marriage is not a 24 hour a day celebration. It is not all feasting and fun. This reminds us of a sobering reality. No joy in this world will last forever. As much as marriage is one of God's greatest earthly blessings, it can still be filled with difficulties. It is the union of two sinners in a sinful world. And at times it is companied by loss and tragedy.

Life in this world is not all feasting. Ecclesiastes describes this life as a time to weep, a time to laugh ... a time to mourn and a time to dance. When we speak of this tension in the believer's life, we sometimes refer to it as "the Church militant." The Church, that is the assembly of all believers, remains torn between two worlds. Through faith in Jesus' resurrection, you have passed from death to life. In this sense you are already enjoying the blessings of heaven. The resurrection in one place of Scripture is described as yours right now – "He has made us alive together with Christ." (Eph. 2) But also the resurrection in another place is described as something we are still waiting for. For the last trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised incorruptible." (1 Cor. 15:52)

And so you are in the world, but not of the world. This is "the Church militant." You are not yet seated at the full feast of glory. You are on a militant's path, within a battlefield, still surrounded by enemies. Still your earthly body and sinful flesh are still with you. (**v.8b**). How we long for that day. But still tears remain a part of your life. And what is it that makes us cry? Is it the stress of your busy life? Is it pain or loss? At times it makes us angry that things in our life are not fitting into place correctly. We want this square shape we have designed to fit into this circular hole. When our children get hungry – which it seems is all the time – we notice things get a little more tense. The kids are unhappy. The grown ups are unhappy. Everyone just wants to eat. In this world we often grow hungry. We crave more. We see how much we lack. We are the square shape trying to fit into a circular hole. Things never seem to line up right.

What we need more than anything is the cross shape. Our sin-shaped obstacles must be replaced by the cross. The cross shape fits perfectly into whatever hole you are trying to fill. Though we are torn between two worlds, between a body that is dying and a soul that is alive, we find what we need to fill our emptiness. It shows us God's purpose for you is good – get you to the feast.

When Jesus fed the 5000, there were so many that came after Him for the wrong reasons. "Jesus answered them and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled." (John 6:26). They looked to Jesus to solve their problems with earthly means. He responds: ""Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal."" (John 6:27) This is what you crave. "Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst." (John 6:35) ... "I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh."" (John 6:51)

A taste of heaven. That is what God gives us today. ""It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life." (John 6:63) What Jesus brings you to fill your hungry soul is His word. In His Word and In His Sacrament God visits you with this feast of salvation. Sustained by sin we starve, but nourished by Bread of Life, we revive. Jesus serves us the life He lived in your place, the life that He gave in your place. And how does this come to us?

Let us cling to this life. This life is not about finding the food which perishes, it is about food for your soul. **"Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God."** (Colossians 3:1–3)

Though still hidden, your the resurrection is yours. Through faith, you are already raised up. You are already alive. And so we march onward. We wait – The Church militant. We face tears, pain, and our own sins in this world. But we hold fast to our Lord's resurrection to find sins forgiven. We find an unchanging promise of life. This world is fading away, and death with it – but the Word of the LORD stands forever.

Nothing more is needed to guarantee this for you than God's Word: v.8 – "**For the LORD, the unchanging God, has spoken.**"

We sing of our unchanging Redeemer in the words of <u>Hymn: 200:1,3,5</u>.

3. The feast is served – The Church triumphant.

Every guest wants to know – what will they serve at the reception. Heaven is not golden harps and clouds. He promises a feast. He promises the Church will pass from militant to triumphant.

(<u>v.6</u>) But how do you know you will be there? How do you know you will be a part of the Church triumphant? For instance, if the president of the United States was holding a Christmas banquet, would you be able to walk in and join him? How much more would we expect the to need an invitation if we are joining God for dinner. Jesus says, "Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast." "Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered together all they found, both evil and good; and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests." (Matthew 22:9–10)

Jesus' parables show us that the invitation to God's kingdom is not according to the individual's worthiness. He brings in the lame, the poor, the lowly – those incapable of helping themselves. It has nothing to with out works.

v.7 – He will destroy on this mountain The surface of the covering cast over <u>all</u> <u>people</u>.

The victory is inclusive, not exclusive. Our Savior has destroyed death for all people. The invitation is to every sinner. God's sacrifice of His son was for the sins of the whole world. And through baptism, this all becomes yours. **"Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."** (Romans 6:4) By His grace, God makes you a member of the Church triumphant.

(9) GOD makes good on His promises. After all His name is the LORD, that is Jehovah, the name which means "I AM." He does not change or go back on His word. "He who believes and is baptized will be saved."

A seat awaits you – next to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God has prepared a victor's share in this triumph, even though you did not earn it. What is parially ours now will become fully known. What is it that you need to sit down and eat? Spirits don't eat and drink. The resurrection that is in our hearts will also join our bodies. We will receive an incorruptible, glorified body that will feel no pain or sorrow.

We cling to these promises when faced with the loss of a fellow believer. When that child or spouse is taken from us, we cling to the promise – "I am the resurrection and

the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die." (John 11:25–26).

God has spared no expense. ($\underline{v.6}$) He has laid out all the trimmings. He serves you the best He can provide. If you like food, you will like heaven. It makes our mouths water. But even more importantly, if you like being at one with God, if you like the idea of sitting down and talking with your Redeemer in the peace of forgiveness, then you will like heaven even more.

It seems guests become the most restless when they are made to wait - when the friend of the groom grabs the mic and seems to drone on forever. Hungry? Why wait? Why be restless? God's heavenly feast is right here in His Word and Sacrament. – not for your eyes or stomache, but for your heart.

This is the Feast of Victory for our God.

Jesus lives! For me He died, Hence will I, to Jesus living, Pure in heart and act abide, Praise to Him and glory giving. Freely God doth aid dispense; This shall be my confidence.

Amen.

We sing <u>Hymn: 799:1,3,4</u>.