

The Second Sunday of Easter

1 John 5:4-10

Christ is arisen; He is arisen indeed. We all rejoice at that because we have learnt that we are supposed to. Christ is arisen; He is arisen indeed. And that is all well and good for Him, I suppose; but why should I rejoice at that, except that I am supposed to? What does it have to do with me, really, that Christ is arisen, and arisen indeed?

Well, we heard it in our Gospel reading that this: that Christ is arisen, and arisen indeed, what it means is that there is forgiveness of sins for us sinners, and peace with God. The Son of God has won this for us with His holy, bitter innocent, sufferings and death. He has borne for all sinners all judgement for all sin. And with His sufferings, the price and penalty for all our sins and shortcomings has been paid in full, and in abundance, for there was no sin in Him, nothing that belonged to death, and therefore He is risen from the dead, for with the price and penalty being paid, in full and in abundance, there was no need for Him to remain in death who died for the sin of the world, nor for any who belong to Him, any whom He will claim as His own. Therefore is it that He showed His wounds to His Apostles, as He proclaimed His peace to be upon them. And therefore is it that He could send His servants to the world with the Word in which is salvation for sinners, just as the Father had sent Him for the salvation of sinners: *If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them!*

Christ is arisen; He is arisen indeed. His love has conquered the devil, and His own righteous wrath against sin; He has overcome all temptation, and borne all suffering for sinners, and brought the eternal will of God to completion, which is the salvation of sinners. He has conquered. And His victory is our salvation, and our victory, also. As He has conquered, and has been raised from death, so shall we not perish and die for ever, or suffer for ever in His judgement against our sin, rather, we shall be raised from death, also, to live with Him forever, in the fullness of His goodness and His glory. As He had also said it already in advance to His Apostles: *As I live, so you shall live also.*

This we learn, also, from what we hear today of Holy Scripture, what He has had His holy Apostle John write: *Whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world: our faith*

So our faith is not just something that we ourselves think.

It is not just what we have come to believe because we have been raised to believe it, and were not intelligent and independent enough to think for ourselves; nor is the faith what we ourselves have chosen to think because others convinced us that it would be good for us to believe it. Rather, our faith is *the victory that has overcome the world*; our faith is *His* own victory, who is arisen, and arisen indeed, which has overcome the world, and that in us which is of the world, ungodliness and unbelief, so that we have been made to surrender to His love and submit to His Word of salvation. It is His own life in us, which has made us to come alive from the death of disobedience and defiance to live with Him instead, and *for* Him, as He Himself lives in us.

As we become accustomed to what happens in Church it is easy for us to come to think lightly of it. After all, it happens every Sunday. It is easy for us to come to think of it as just motions we go through. We say what we usually say. We sing some songs; perhaps we hope that some of those songs will be some of the old ones so that we can enjoy the memory of days gone by. And the Pastor says something, for that is his job. And while we do our time and wait for the Pastor to be done, we hope that he has come up with something exciting to say, something entertaining. At best, perhaps, we hope he will have something *inspiring* to say, something that can remind us of what we once came to believe, and make us to think about it a bit, and think about how we can live a better life, so we can feel better about ourselves, and about being Christian.

Clearly the risen Christ thinks differently about our life with Him, about the faith, and about worship; He certainly *teaches* differently about it. As we hear it today that He has had His holy Apostle write it: *If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God, what He has testified of His Son.*

Yes, for the Word that is spoken in His faithful Church is not just *the testimony of men*, or of women, for that matter. What is preached in His faithful Church is not just *this man's opinion*, and certainly not *this woman's*; rather, in His faithful Church, He Himself speaks through the man He has given to the Christians in this and that particular congregation as their own shepherd and preacher and teacher. He has His chosen servant speak what He Himself has given to His servant to speak, through years of training and studies, and by breathing it into his heart and mind by His Holy Spirit. Through His chosen servant He Himself speaks His Word of salvation into the hearts of those who will hear, and with it, salvation itself!

In the faithful Church of Christ, where His ordinances are honoured, and His Word and command obeyed, preaching and teaching is nothing less than the testimony of God Himself of the Son and His salvation, spoken by His own appointed servant, whom His Christians owe it to God to obey, in the way they behave as well as as to what they believe, and whom they *will* obey, in so far as they are His Christians¹

It is easy, though, as we become accustomed to having the Word of God spoken to us by somebody we know, and perhaps know only *too well*, to forget that in His Church God Himself speaks to us; it is easy for us to come to think of the Word of God as just *this man's opinion*.

Similarly, it is easy for us to come to think of what we do in Church as merely motions we go through, at best as illustrations of our *real* life with God, signs to inspire and encourage us in what we think; to think of the festive meal of salvation as only a *reminder* that our Lord Jesus gave His body up to death for us, and shed His blood; to think of the Baptism of our babies as only an illustration of how God will be ready to embrace them once they grow up so as to be able to think about life, and about God, the way we have tried to teach them to think.

Clearly, again, He who is risen, and risen indeed, He thinks differently, and teaches differently. *This is He who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, as we hear it; not by water alone, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is Truth.*

Our Lord Jesus came, and comes, *by water and blood*, that is: in the waters of Baptism, and with His blood, which He gives to us in His festive meal of salvation, along with His body. He Himself comes to us and gives Himself to us, with all that He is, and all that is His, for our salvation. And this is for real, and to this the Spirit testifies: that it is for real; which means that He Himself bears witness to this: that all of this is for real, for the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, and of Christ, His very own innermost self, and His life and breath, by which His own life lives in us, and we are alive to Him.

What happens in Church happens in the reality of God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. *For there are three that bear witness in Heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one, as we hear it that He has had His holy Apostle write it. And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one. And, again: If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God, what He has testified of His Son.*

Truly Christian preaching and teaching and worship is nothing less than God Himself giving His own living testimony of His salvation, and living Himself in us, and working His salvation in us, by means of His own life, and His love, so that we come alive to His love, for real. He Himself works His salvation in us by His Word and worship; in all that we do and say and sing, as His faithful Church, because He has taught us to do and say and sing it, through the treasure He has given and preserved for His Church, in her truthful traditions, and in His ordinances, and in Holy Scripture. In the life of His Church, He does exactly what He has said He would do for His Church and His Christians: He saves sinners such as ourselves, for His life, and lives with us and within us.

As we also hear it today that the Apostle writes it: *he who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself*. We have His own testimony in us because He Himself lives in us; therefore it is that we believe in Him.

The world will not believe; nor will we ourselves, not with that in us which is of the world. Nevertheless, *He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself*. Therefore is the faith victorious in us: because it is *His own life*, who is risen, and risen indeed, and lives, and comes to His Christians, and gives His own life to us. For us to have come to the faith is nothing less than a *new birth* into a completely different reality than our own, which is, at its worst, a reality of evil and ungodliness and unbelief, and at its best is one of imperfect attempts at goodness and godliness; it is the new birth of water and the Spirit, which has nothing to do with our own attempts at goodness and godliness, our half-hearted choice and decision and dedication, by which we seek our own glory, really, rather than His. As the Apostle writes it elsewhere of those who received the Son of God and became children of God: *they were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but born of God*.

And for us to *remain* in the faith is nothing less than constantly being born anew by having the life of God given to us anew, ever anew, in His Word and worship, out of His goodness and mercy.

Whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world: our faith. As we live in His love, under His living Word of love, His love will be victorious, and keep us with Him in the faith, until we shall be with Him forever in His Kingdom and His heavenly life.

Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing. Amen.