

Jeremiah 31

At that time, declares the Lord,

I will be the God of all the families of Israel,
and they will be my people.

2 The Lord proclaims:

The people who survived the sword
found grace in the wilderness.

As Israel searched for a place of rest,

3 the Lord appeared to them[a] from a distance:[b]

I have loved you with a love that lasts forever.

And so with unfailing love,

I have drawn you to myself.[c]

4 Again, I will build you up,

and you will be rebuilt, virgin Israel.

Again, you will play your tambourines

and dance with joy.

5 Again, you will plant vineyards

on the hills of Samaria;

farmers will plant and then enjoy the harvests.

6 The time will come when

the watchmen shout from

the highlands of Ephraim:

“Get ready! We’re going up to Zion

to the Lord our God!”

Colossians 3

Therefore, if you were raised with Christ, look for the things that are above where Christ is sitting at God’s right side. 2 Think about the things above and not things on earth. 3 You died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

Luke 24

36 While they were saying these things, Jesus himself stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” 37 They were terrified and afraid. They thought they were seeing a ghost.

38 He said to them, “Why are you startled? Why are doubts arising in your hearts? 39 Look at my hands and my feet. It’s really me! Touch me and see, for a ghost doesn’t have flesh and bones like you see I have.” 40 As he said this, he showed them his hands and feet. 41 Because they were wondering and questioning in the midst of their happiness, he said to them, “Do you have anything to eat?” 42 They gave him a piece of baked fish. 43 Taking it, he ate it in front of them.

44 Jesus said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the Law from Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be

fulfilled.” 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. 46 He said to them, “This is what is written: the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and a change of heart and life for the forgiveness of sins must be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 Look, I’m sending to you what my Father promised, but you are to stay in the city until you have been furnished with heavenly power.”

Sermon

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing to you O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer: Amen.

Christ is risen! **Christ is risen indeed!** That Easter refrain declares over and again the summary of our faith: Jesus of Nazareth, the one who died, lives again! That chorus of resurrection that we sing now resonates through every crevasse and crest of creation. Jesus Christ left the tomb, leaving only death in his grave. The Spirit of life now reigns on earth, for the same Spirit that gave breath to Eve and Adam, that spoke into being every ounce of water and every atom of matter, that very same Spirit brought back from hell the body of Jesus. Christ is risen! **Christ is risen indeed!** That's why we gather today. We gather because Christ rose from the dead. And that changes, quite literally, everything.

Yet, of course, Jesus does as he normally does, and turns the attention away from himself. Rather than bask in the glory of his resurrection, Jesus instead points to the disciples and declares, “you are witnesses of these things.” Witnesses of what? Witnesses of the honest to goodness resurrection of Jesus in the body. The body that spoke words to them. The body that the disciples touched. The body that ate fish. This body that the encounter before them is the same body that ate the last supper with them and taught them how to pray and touched the man born blind. We are witnesses that life, real, touchable, breathable, smellable life, won out over the decay of death.

Some people wonder what difference it makes whether Jesus rose from the dead. To be perfectly honest, it’s a hard thing to believe! Does it make any difference whether Jesus’s body actually rose from the grave? Paul, in 1st Corinthians 15, puts it pretty succinctly: “If Christ hasn’t been raised, then our preaching

is useless and your faith is useless.” Our faith is built upon a belief, on faith, on a trust even amid our doubt, that Jesus Christ really died and then really rose out of the grave to renewed life. Why does that matter? Why does it matter that we’re witnesses of a bodily resurrection? Why are we focused on this miracle?

Simply put, because you’re not just data. You’re more than just zeros and ones stored in a machine. You’re not just a disembodied soul, not a mind stored in a meat container. You’re so much more than that. And Jesus came to save all of you, not just some of you or a select portion, not just your mind. The story of Easter is the story of the full redemption offload humanity: body and mind, given life through the Spirit.

That word redemption needs a little bit of explanation. You see we don't often use this word anymore with the exception of coupons and arcade tickets. To redeem something means to give it value, to restore value, or to honor its value, even though on it's

own, that value wasn't there. If you go to an arcade and you earn a bunch of tickets playing a game, you can then redeem them for prizes. Even though the tickets have no value as currency, at the arcade, the attendant redeems them, and says these are as valuable as a giant stuffed orange striped clownfish, you know, the one that we can technically call Nemo because Disney owns those rights, but looks a lot like Nemo. Or, if you're as bad at the arcade as I am and bring them so pathetically few tickets, they'll say, these are as valuable as a gumball, an eraser, and one of those sticky hands you throw at the wall. The tickets don't have worth until they are redeemed for certain values.

What God does for us is redeem us, for before the resurrection of Jesus, our value was tied to our sin, a bond we could never break on our own. But when Jesus broke the chains of the grave, he brought into humanity an entirely new value, not one based in our action, but one based in his own action of life, death,

and resurrection. We're redeemed, we're given value, because God looks at us through the lens of Jesus. God looks at each of us as though we were Jesus, even if we don't deserve it.

That's why Easter's redemption is different than an arcade. The redemption we experience in Christ's resurrection doesn't depend on how many tickets we bring, or whether we're in the Platinum VIP club to get the 60% off coupon. There's not enough tickets in all the world's arcades for us to earn our way back from sin. Instead, when God became human in Jesus, God gave divine value to human existence, God gave all that is human, bodies and minds, eternal value. Jesus dies because that's what humans do, but Jesus rises from the dead to secure forever that divine value into our human form. That's redemption, that God's value now forever belongs in human beings.

So, when we say all of us is redeemed, we mean that our bodies and minds are destined for eternity. Now, we can't explain

the physics of that any more than I can explain the biology of the resurrection. But we're here because we believe it's a miracle, and that it's a miracle God invites us into. The resurrection is God's invitation for us to enter the miraculous, the realm where all things are possible because of Jesus. We're witnesses of God's redemption of all humanity, of you and of me and of all people.

So, what does this mean?

God looks at your body as Jesus's body, and calls it holy. No matter how negatively you view your body, or how terrible others have treated it, God calls your body holy. Your body is valued, is loved, is beautiful, is worth more than you could even imagine. The same is true of other's bodies as well, for all are created in God's image and so all deserve our respect. None deserve the violence we so often do to bodies, because Jesus redeemed those bodies. None deserve the same we direct at bodies, because Jesus calls that body beloved. Not because of anything you've

done, but because in the resurrection of Jesus, God sealed divinity in our humanity.

God looks at your mind as Jesus's mind, and calls it holy. No matter what your mind is able to do, no matter your ACT score or ability to even make words, God calls your mind holy. Even if your grades aren't that great, or if you're not thinking as quickly as you used to, God calls your mind holy, not because of anything you've done, but because in the resurrection of Jesus, God sealed divinity in our humanity.

In Jesus's resurrection, God redeemed all bodies and all minds. Let's be clear about that. Black bodies and white bodies and brown bodies and bodies of all races. Bodies of all shapes and sizes. Bodies of all abilities, bodies that walk and roll. Slow bodies and fast. Bodies of all genders. Minds that love all people. Minds that learn in different ways. Minds that don't speak our language or communicate in ways that we understand. Minds that exist across

the spectrum of activity. Minds that face depression or ADHD.

There is no body that Jesus did not rise to save, no mind that Jesus did not rise to bless. God intends to redeem us all in the work of Easter.

That's why those wounds on Christ's hands and feet and side make such a difference. These are truly our bodies. The bodies that we've struggled with. The bodies that have succeeded and failed, the bodies that have strengthened and broken. God redeems even our wounds, making our scars evidence of faithfulness beyond death and into resurrection. God doesn't cause our wounds, but heals them. God doesn't force us to suffer, but in Jesus's crucifixion suffers with us, and in Jesus's resurrection heals us all, body and mind.

That's the good news in Jesus, friends. In the resurrection, all of you is healed and made whole. Our humanity, all of it, is restored in Jesus's journey from death into life. The invitation of

the church, at its best, is to come discover what that looks like, to explore in a community how to take hold of this new life that Jesus brings into our bodies and minds. My prayer for you this Easter is that you'd know two things: Jesus saved all of you through his life, death, and resurrection, and Jesus invites you to understand that so deeply that it changes all of your life, beginning today.

That's what you're witnesses of, the fullness of God's salvation of the whole world. And here, together in a community called Christ Lutheran Church, we're committed to learning that story so we can tell that story in a way that helps the whole world know God's love for them in Jesus. You are witnesses of what God has done, not just in raising Jesus from the grave, but in bringing new life to us all. And there's one thing that makes a witness useful to the public: they tell their story so that others can know the truth that they've seen. So friends, my prayer is not just that you'd know that Jesus invites you to transformation through his resurrection,

but that you'd share that goodness, share that gift, share that Gospel, with everyone who can benefit from it.

After all, who couldn't use some transformation in their lives?

Christ is risen! **Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!** Amen.