



“Resurrection Impact: Sing with Angels”

Fourth Sunday of Easter
5:30 pm, Saturday, April 16, 2016
8:15 & 11:00 am, Sunday, April 17, 2016
The Reverend Dr. Jack M. Horner
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Acts 9:36-43; Psalm 23; Revelation 7:9-17; John 10:22-30

Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

So are you already for tomorrow? That great national festival that we all look forward to, you know, you can always count on a couple of things in life, death and taxes. But let's be honest, if we think about it, it is more than just death and taxes, isn't it? There are a lot of things that we know are happening in our lives or in our world that are just going to happen whether you like it or not. Those illnesses are going to continue to come, even as we see the great progress that has been made in the medical community over so many different illnesses, diseases, that were so destructive in years going by. You just know that somewhere along the way there's going to be another one or two that are just going to pop up that we never heard of before. Zika, anybody? And of course, the brokenness that we see in relationships, that will continue we can count on that to be around next year as well. Whether it's in families or personal relationships, marital relationships, that brokenness will continue to be a part of our life whether we like it or not. And of course for many of us who are a part of the church, whether members of congregations or pastors, or other leaders we're concerned about the decline that we've seen in the mainline congregations. And, let's not forget about terrorism. I don't remember it being that big of a deal when I was growing up. But now we see terrorism across the globe and how it affects each part of that globe, almost like a spider's web, something can happen way over here and yet it touches our lives and concerns us someplace else.

What do we do about these things that we can count on? I know I've been concerned as I said before about the decline in the church and there are a number of different factors that we can probably look to. We are certainly living in a hostile culture to spiritual things, especially Christian spiritual things. We continue to see persecution, sometimes subtle, sometimes overt. Many of us have come from smaller congregations and we've seen how those congregations have struggled over the years, over the decades. My own home congregation closed now probably twelve years ago. The reasons may be the consumerism or the consumer's philosophy that we've taken on, or individualism, or perhaps just a loss of identity, maybe a loss of passion. On one level I'd like to say these are all new concerns for the church, but you know what, these things have been around for a really, really long time.

Sure, we've gone through periods where everything seemed to be just working out okay, but if we really look historically in the life of the church, these things that we can count on, they've been around.

The revelation that John offers to the churches, first and foremost is a letter to churches to actual churches that face similar problems, similar situations like you and me. Three of those congregations in Ephesus, Sardis, and Laodicea in Turkey 2000 years ago were in danger of losing their very identity as Christian congregations. John says of one of them that they are lukewarm in faith. That they're neither hot for the gospel or cold to spiritual things, they're just blah. And God wanted more than just a boring church.

Two others are seriously compromising their very loyalty to Jesus Christ. Yes, these things have been around for a very long time. And for John it ushers in a time for tribulation for believers and the seriousness of our Christian faith and also a warning, a punishment for unbelievers. And so John's revelation filled with all sorts of imagery, heavenly armies, trials, satanic deception, battles and heavenly victory.

You see brothers and sisters, ultimately the challenges that you and I face whether in the church or outside of the church, the temptations, the compromises, the oppression, the persecutions, the suffering for Jesus, ultimately these will be redeemed. And the ultimate victory will belong to our God. And there's nothing that all of these challenges can do to us that's going to take that away.

A long time before Jesus, the prophet Isaiah spoke of such things. The Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth for the Lord has spoken. He goes on to say that death, the greatest enemy of you and I will be no more. These prophecies, these revelations are to offer to you and to me strength and the very power of God in our midst. They are there to help us confirm our faith and to hold on to God and his grace no matter what we might be experiencing in the world around us. And when we do, when those things that we can count on press down upon us, John's revelation is to teach us that our suffering is linked to the very suffering of Jesus. Our death is linked to the very death of Jesus, and if that is so, so too you and I are linked to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, linked to his power and glory and might to defeat the powers of sin and death and to rise to new life.

John's revelation calls for a remnant, a church that is triumphant, with a beautiful image that he gives of us of psalm branches, praising God in the midst of oppression and suffering. We belong and have always belonged to a martyr church, whether it was slaves in antebellum South going out into the woods to sing the praises of God in gospel hymns or early Christians going to their deaths in the Colosseum singing songs, or even our brothers and sisters in Nigeria or Syria, or Kenya, or Iraq offering songs of praise to God in spite of the persecutions that they face.

We brothers and sisters singing of the victory of the lamb of God. He went to death for us and now is our good shepherd who sits at the right hand of God in heaven. And that image of heaven for you and for me is one where God reveals his purposes in the lamb. It will be a place for us of unceasing praise where there are no tears, no pain, no sorrow, no thirst or hunger. And so in spite of all of those things which come to pass, which we

have no control over, we will be victorious. Not because of somehow we have suffered through it but because Christ is victorious over suffering and we faithfully follow Jesus Christ who died for us and is exalted and deserves our praise and our songs.

And so this Easter season as we reflect upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ, know that your voices join with the voices of all of the heavenly hosts with angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim, we join our voices to sing praise to the God of resurrection and thanksgiving and gratitude. We join our voices with the angels that sing *"Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen"*

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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