

“Easter Surprise”
Easter Sunday

April 1, 2018
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Pastor Hartwig

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, Our Heavenly Fathers
And Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

[*Introduction*] The story is told....

The people of England were anxiously awaiting
the outcome of the battle of Waterloo.

In this battle, the British army, under the command of the Duke of Wellington,
was battling the French army, under the command of Napoleon.

A series of stations, each one in sight of the next, had been set up
to send visible coded messages from the battlefield back to England.

Finally, the message arrived: “*Wellington defeated . . .*”

But as this was being spelled out, a sudden blanket of fog rolled in,
and they could not see the signals.

The people of England were heartbroken.

Their commander and his army had apparently been defeated.

However, the reason for the sad news

was because the fog had interrupted the sending of the coded message.

Actually, the complete message had not been received.

The message was to say: “*Wellington defeated Napoleon at Waterloo.*”

Later, the fog cleared, and the full message was communicated.

The outcome of the battle was the exact opposite
of what the people had originally thought.

Wellington and the British had, in fact, not lost the battle at all! They had won!

On Good Friday, the message from the cross appeared to say: “Jesus Christ defeated ...”

His lifeless body was laid in the tomb,
and his followers returned to their residences
filled with grief and hopelessness.

It seemed that the archenemy, Satan, had won the most decisive victory in history.

But Easter Sunday brought the rest of the story, as Paul Harvey would say.

The full message, revealed on Easter Sunday, is:

“Jesus Christ defeated Satan at Calvary!”

The resurrection of Christ shows who the true victor is.

Furthermore,

just as the whole British nation shared in Wellington’s victory over Napoleon,
so also all Christians share in Jesus’ victory over the devil and death.

***The resurrection shows Jesus to be the true victor over sin and death,
and his victory is shared with us – you and me.***

[***Surprise***] Surprisingly, Christ’s victory came as a surprise,
a surprise even to his closest followers.

Nobody ever expected that Jesus would come out of that tomb alive.

His companions thought that Friday afternoon was the last they would see of him.

The first people to be surprised were the women who arrived at the tomb early oh so early.

They carried spices for anointing Jesus’ dead body.

They expected Jesus to be dead.

They expected that the stone would need rolled away.

And hoped the guards were gracious enough to open the tomb for them.

And they expected all they would find inside would be a corpse.

Instead, what they found at the gravesite was that the guards were gone,
the stone was rolled away,
and the body of Jesus was gone.

An empty tomb was not what they expected. It was a huge surprise!

Even more surprising, however, was what the two messengers
—we know that they were angels—told them.

They said: ***“Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen”***

Talk about surprising news! He’s not dead? He has risen? He’s alive?

This certainly was not what the women expected.

But it wasn’t only these women who were surprised on that Sunday morning.

The apostles were surprised as well.

[Foretold]

The fact that Jesus rose from the dead took everyone by surprise.
But the followers of Jesus shouldn't have been surprised.
Jesus had told them beforehand that this would happen.

And so, the angels are surprised.
They're surprised at the surprise of the women.
They're surprised that the women didn't see Jesus' resurrection coming.

AND The angels ask, "***Why do you seek the living among the dead?***" (v 5).
In other words, they say:

***"Why are you expecting the One who is the source of life to be dead?
Don't you remember that Jesus said he would rise from the dead?"***

Jesus had predicted his death, and he had predicted his resurrection.
So there should be no surprise that he was alive.

[Spiritual Victory]

But perhaps nowhere was the surprise of Christ's victory over death
greater than in the spiritual realm.

It appeared as if Satan and his demonic hordes had won.
In the battle of the ages,
the fallen prince of darkness had done all he could
to bring the Prince of Peace under his power.

When Jesus succumbed to death,
it appeared that he had been swallowed up into Satan's dominion forever.

Yet in what appears to be a victory for the enemy, God brings about a surprise.
While in the very grasp of death, Jesus overcomes death.
The victim suddenly is shown to be the victor!
He who was dead now is alive again!
Christ is risen. ***He is risen, indeed. Alleluia!***

In Jesus' death and resurrection the will of God is done.

The good and gracious will of God is done for you
– your sins are forgiven, salvation, even life everlasting is yours!

[Also Ours]

BUT Perhaps the biggest surprise of all—and the most wonderful—
is the fact that God’s surprise victory is our victory too.

Christ’s death and resurrection are not only history, or *his* story.
They are *our* story as well.

This is because in the mind of God
every believer shares completely with Christ
in his death and resurrection.

Death no longer has ultimate power over us
because we have been raised with Jesus through faith.

Therefore, you, as a member of Christ’s body, his Church, are unified with Christ
in his conquest over sin, Satan, and death.

[Conclusion]

On June 18, 1815, when the fog had dispersed,
the people of England received the full message from the battlefield:
“Wellington defeated Napoleon at Waterloo!”

Wellington’s victory over Napoleon brought victory to all British citizens.

So also, when the fog of surprise and doubt had cleared on that first Easter Sunday,
when we realized and are convinced this is no April Fool’s joke,
the message of the empty tomb was clear:
“Jesus Christ has defeated Satan, sin, death, and hell!”

Christ is risen. ***He is risen, indeed. Alleluia!***

As a result, Christ’s conquest now brings victory to all of God’s people.
He brings victory to *you!*

AND That is the greatest surprise of all. AMEN!

“Now may the God of peace... equip you with everything good
that you may do his will, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.
Amen.” (Heb 13:20-21)
