

ST. PETER'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, WATERFORD, WI
EASTER VIGIL – APRIL 16, 2022
EXODUS 14 – 15 & OTHER VIGIL TEXTS

Israel was stuck. Pharaoh - close behind. The Red Sea - dead ahead. The oppressor pursued. The unforgiving deep blocked their way to a new life. They were stuck.

You also are stuck. Behind you are years of failing God's Law – rebellion, complaint, self-seeking, self-pity, reluctance to forgive, lack of trust in God, a heart divided by worry, laziness in love and prayer. Behind you also prowls Satan – deceiving, accusing and seeking to devour. You cannot go back and make things right. Ahead is more of the same - for your old Adam will not stay drowned – he swims so well. Ahead of you also lies your death – and there is no way around. In the strength of you own wisdom and effort - you are stuck!

Dear Christians, you are blessed to know that and to confess it! You are also right to rejoice in Moses' beautiful proclamation at the Red Sea. *Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord...the Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.* In this most holy night our Savior, Christ the Lord, broke the power of death by His resurrection. He brought life and salvation to all creation! He also claimed the victory over Satan, breaking his power to accuse you before God. This is what you confess in the Apostles' Creed when you say – “he descended into hell.”

Your rescue is so full because Jesus – in the flesh – willingly stuck Himself into your place – the place deserving of God's damning wrath. Behind Him and on Him on the cross was the sin of all the ages. On Him were the sins of all your years (past, present, future). *The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all ... he was crushed for our iniquities* (Is. 53). The One who said “*Let there be...*” and gave life at creation – hung in naked shame before the great sea of death.

The garden tomb received His lifeless body like waves of the sea rolling over Him. He was dead and buried. But no enemy can hold God in the flesh! Alleluia! Christ is risen! **HE IS RISEN INDEED! ALLELUIA!** Death, hell and Satan, He vanquished his foes! As the Red Sea drowned Pharaoh's hosts, the death of Christ routed the devil's hosts. On this holy night, what is true of Jesus is also true of you – His holy Church. This is the night when all who believe in Christ are restored to life and immortality!

Beloved of God, that's why you are right to rejoice with Father Abraham who was taught that he need not offer up his son. The Lord provides Himself as substitute – the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. That's why you are right to praise God with Noah and his family. In the midst of the flood's death and decay they were given life and safety in the ark. In our decaying culture of death, you are given life and salvation in the ark of Christ's body - His Church. Corresponding exactly to the rescue of those eight in the flood, baptism now saves you (1 Peter 3:21). Baptized into the atoning death of Christ you have been born again to a living hope through His resurrection. In that washing of rebirth, He has breathed new life into your dry bones and He will open your graves. Your baptism is as fresh and cleansing today as when you first received it. You are stuck no longer! With Job, you are right to say, *"I know that my Redeemer lives...in my flesh I shall see God."* When you face threats from the proud Nebuchadnezzar(s) of our day you are right to say with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego *"our God whom we serve is able to deliver us...we will not serve your gods."*

Alleluia! Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!** As the heavens (He created) are higher than the earth (He created), so are His thoughts higher than your thoughts. Who would have counseled the living Christ to fight for you with rich food that no money can buy? His Word does not return to Him empty. At His Table the living Christ serves you His very body to eat and His very blood to drink. Sinners that you are, He has restored your fortunes as His saints. That's why

He continues to gather you here each week – not for you to do something for Him, but primarily for Him to fight for you - to bring to completion that good work which He has begun in you.

Yes, yes distress is all around you, warfare, political chaos, educational decay, disrespect for authority, crippling inflation. But the prophet Zephaniah spoke to even more unsettled times – in Jeremiah’s day - with Jerusalem on the brink of total destruction and captivity by Babylon.

Zephaniah spoke the Law as if there was no Gospel. He hammered it home! But He also spoke the Gospel as if there was no Law – so full – so free! *“Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; Rejoice...with all your heart...The Lord has taken away the judgments against you...That’s what it means that the seal of the grave is broken – Jesus lives ... Satan is thrown down ... The Lord is in your midst a mighty one who will save. You are stuck no more!*

When Satan hisses to your conscience that you don’t measure up – Luther says that you are free to agree with him, but also to tell him that He must now accuse Christ – *for the Lord has taken away the judgments against you.* How blessed is this night when man is reconciled to God in Christ! In the Name of Jesus, Amen.