

“The Sign of Power”  
(Last Installment of the Series “The Sign of the Cross”)  
The Feast of the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ  
April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015  
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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Alleluia! Christ is Risen! [Reply:] He is risen indeed! Alleluia! We began this series on “the Sign of the Cross” with an important commentary on the distinction between “just” crosses and crucifixes. There’s most definitely a difference. Crosses can mean all kinds of things, and while the crucifix might be misunderstood, it is hard to get around from what they exactly represent: Jesus died on the Cross of Calvary. It happened. This is the stuff of real history. When our Lord was dying on His cross from 9 am to 3 pm on the first Good Friday, something very interesting happened at 12 pm -- high noon -- the Scriptures record “there was darkness over all the land” (Matthew 27:45) and then at 3 pm when our Savior breathed His last, the Scriptures say that there was an earthquake: “the earth shook, and the rocks were split.” (Matthew 27:51) And this is where if Matthew was in on a fabrication, a mythological tale, then this is where he surely blew it...why did he have to go and include all of this other drama, things that people could check into...unless of course what he was recording actually happened. Yes, perhaps this is all about what is real, including Jesus’ really living with us today, right here, right now! As for the darkness and the earthquake. Ancient scholar Julius Africanus (writing around AD 221) referred to Thallus who wrote a history of the Eastern Mediterranean world from the Trojan War to his own time. In a history Thallus wrote around AD 52 (about 20 years after Jesus died on the cross), Thallus also dealt with a cosmic report that occurred during his lifetime in the land of Jesus’ crucifixion:

*On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness, and the rocks were rent by an earthquake, and many places in Judea, and other districts were thrown down. (Gary Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for The Life of Christ* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press Publishing Company, 1996), 197.)*

How ‘bout that? Isn’t that a coincidence? No its not. Thallus is describing what the Scriptures also recorded. It happened.

But why all of this connected to the crucifixion? Last Sunday among the wonderful 14 confessions of faith of our confirmands, Joshua Bradford compared the power of the Word of God contained in the water of holy baptism to be greater than the force of gravity, greater than a 8.0 magnitude earthquake, and greater than the power of electricity. Joshua reminded us that the power of the Word of God in holy baptism is the power that created the heavens and the earth! This is the power of the Word of Christ which unites people to Jesus when they are baptized and when this happens they are flooded not merely by water, but flooded by the

forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life. You the baptized have been flooded with eternal life, because you're now clothed with the Living Lord Jesus! Yes, the Word is powerful...to put it mildly.

These things point to the cross of Jesus therefore as a sign of power. Remember who Jesus was; remember who Jesus is. He is the Word and the Word of God is powerful. He was the One who created the heavens and the earth...it was the Word that went forth to create...Jesus was creating all things!

And Jesus – the power of God unto salvation – entered into death. We spoke of it night before last. When Jesus entered death on the cross of Calvary, it was as if a super virus had injected itself into the universal virus called death. A super power beyond all description entered death; death which supposedly had the power to quell all power. Not this time.

The sign of the cross of Jesus includes the sign of power and of victory over death. And this is why it is appropriate to speak of the sign of the cross on Easter Sunday. Sometimes we Christians can get confused. It was on the cross that Jesus won our salvation. What could be more important than that? But it is the resurrection that we call the “pivotal event” of the Christian faith. St. Paul proclaims its crucial importance in 1<sup>st</sup> Cor 15...if Christ is not raised, then we are to be pitied more than all people; if Christ is not raised, then we are still in our sins. So what could be more important than this? So what are we to do? The crucifixion seems indispensable, but so does the resurrection! But they are not in competition, they are inextricably linked. They are forged. Because the Lord of Life; the God of Light entered into the darkness of death, there was only ONE result that could occur: death had to give way. Death could not conquer Him, but He conquered death. Result and the sign of power? The Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ!

But let me remind you that of the most powerful signs, there are signs. Of the sign of the crucifixion, there was darkness...a sign that the very Son of God while on the cross knew separation from His Father who turned away from the Son to accept His taking your curse and sin. And while we are glad that our curse and sin in the eyes of God are gone, at the time, it was a terrible and horrific time...the Father turned from His Son and treated Him as we deserved to be treated. This terrible separation of the Father and the Son was reflected in the agony of the cross and in the darkness. The sign of His death was the earthquake. Something unimaginable had occurred: God enfleshed died...the natural order He created had to react...and His power that invaded death had instantaneous results: death was already disrupted! The creation had to respond. These were the signs of the sign.

Jesus is living. This is our cause for celebration this day. This is the reality. This is the fact. He's alive. But this demands signs. The resurrection itself is the sign of the power of the

cross...that Jesus' invading death meant that death lost its power and lost its claim over you and me. But again, there must also be signs of the signs. What are they?

We see some of them in the book of Acts.

Because of Christ having forgiven all sin and thereby conquered all death, there had to be other signs. Such power cannot be hidden. As The Lutheran Study Bible states, "Some interpreters treat Acts like mere history. However, the Book of Acts may rightly be called 'The Acts of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.'" (1829) This is a great point! Since Christ arose, He didn't just disappear, nor was He confined to heaven. As the risen and ascended Lord, this was not in any way a description of any limitation, but much to the contrary, the description of God without limitation. So when the apostles were demonstrating signs of Christ's power; it was not their power; it was Jesus'. This is exactly true for anything that is good that will come from this proclamation...or anything good that possibility came from the proclamation on Good Friday or Pastor Mueller's proclamation on Maundy Thursday...what is good, what is effective, what is beneficial and what is powerful is of the Living Lord, the Resurrected Lord Jesus who still proclaims.

"Luke opens his history (Acts) with a significant clue as to what is going on – and who is leading. 'In the first book,' he notes, 'I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach' (Ac 1:1). The Gospel story (Luke) is not simply an account of what Jesus did, it is the story of what He *began to do*. And its sequel (Acts) records what Jesus *continued to do*. The risen Christ continues His ministry of salvation and restoration through the acts and works of His apostles. And the apostles, for their part, provide a stunning display of the truth behind Paul's statement: 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me' (Gal 2:20). The One who said, 'This is My body; this is My blood' when He instituted that Holy Meal, by which He comes among us and into us, continues to abide with us." (1841) "The sure promise given to the apostles is our promise yet today. Where Christ and His cross are preached, there Christ Himself is active. There His Spirit is present, calling, enlightening, and sanctifying His people. Each of us has been given a walk-on role in the divine drama of salvation, but the Lord Himself remains the actor with top billing. He acts in us, through us, and for us, even to the end of the age." (Ibid., 1841)

Consider these Scriptural examples of the signs of the Living Christ acting and working through His servants:

Acts 2:47: "The Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."

Acts 3:6: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!"

Acts 3:12: "Why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?"

Acts 3:16: “[Jesus] name...and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health.”

Acts 4:10: “By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead – by Him this man is standing before you well.”

Acts 9:34: “Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you.”

Acts 11:21: “The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.”

Again signs of the sign are absolutely necessary, but I deliberately chose examples from the book of Acts to address what many of us wrestle with to this day. If the resurrection is the sign of power flowing from the cross, and if we see this sign of power through such dramatic examples in the Holy Bible as just presented, then what about now? Where is the power now?

We want to know right? Where is the power in the face of ISIS? Where is the power in the face of the rise of the persecution of Christians throughout the world? Where is the power when our loved ones face disease or perhaps when we do...as you might be at this very moment? Where’s the power? Or is Easter Sunday just a mental pep rally for Christians who hold to archaic doctrines and old religious rites so as to make us feel spiritual, a desperate coping mechanism in a cold world that would make anyone a little irrational perhaps?

These are ideas that flow from those who know nothing of the continual power and the continual signs that still to this day flow from the one-time event of Jesus entering death and the one-time event of Jesus rising from the grave...the signs have to come out; they must radiate. It is inevitable, but...

They are signs that are nevertheless controlled by God. And He refuses to use the standards of a world that rejects Him. For a short time He permitted the signs we read about in the book of Acts. They had their purpose. The Church had to be established not only among God’s original chosen people, the Jews, but also the non-Jews/the Gentiles. There could be no doubt that the saving the Gospel was and is and will be always for ALL people. When our Lord died on Calvary’s cross, the Scriptures say that it was “for the sins of the world.” Everyone...every, single person, regardless of their background, their ethnicity, their “orientation,” *all* people – what I addressed a few weeks ago – are covered by the blood of the Lamb...all people have received the forgiveness of sins. There is no one more inclusive than God. He created all people; He died for all people; He forgives all people...and He now calls all people...to have faith. Believe in Christ...who conquered death; believe in Christ who rose from the grave and demonstrated the sign of power. Believe in Christ so that when you die, you won’t be separated from the One who gives true life.

So the signs given in Acts were indeed Jesus’ acts, but for a time and for a purpose: for the Gospel to establish a universal church...the church for all people. This is not to say that God no longer works miracles. He is the God miracles. He can do them whenever He wants to and

that's not the problem. Our problem are the sinful expectations we form. Sometimes without realizing it, we want God to perform miracles without thinking about the consequences. Mary and Martha must have been overwhelmed with joy for their brother Lazarus to be restored to life, but Lazarus would die again...how many times would we have someone we love to die again? What do we ask for? What do we want?

So in mercy, God directs the signs which must flow from the cross and from the empty tomb...they are not lesser signs, they are not consolation signs, but true to form, the Lord of Glory gives signs that are the best of signs, the most meaningful, the most lovely, and the most beneficial for you and for me.

The Living Lord gives three kinds of signs to show you that He's living and to demonstrate His love for you so that while it is still day, you would either come to trust in Him for the first time or so that you would be enabled to continue to trust in Him...this is always salvation...and for those who are not yet in possession of saving faith, don't be distracted by the silly qualifiers that you must do x, y, and/or z in order to come to saving faith...no you don't. Hear the Gospel: Jesus lived and died and rose for you...Jesus destroyed your death; Jesus covered your sin with His life-giving blood and Jesus rose from the grave to give you (accomplished action) the forgiveness of all your sins and the gift of everlasting life! The Gospel is a done deal. Believe it and be saved! And for those who already have saving faith, don't be distracted by the silly stuff either...taking your faith for granted, or being tempted to think that you need the Gospel less...tempted to rest on your history, your laurels...no way, no how...you need the Gospel as much today as you did the first day God formed saving faith in your hearts...you might even need it more on account of your complacency. So hold to the signs...we need them...they bring us to life and they keep us alive:

The First Sign: The Risen Lord Jesus Christ PREACHES. Leading up to this service – and in this past year – how many sermons have you heard? If the preacher is faithful to the Word, then when that preacher preaches (whoever he is), then that sermon is not his sermon, but it is Jesus' sermon. Of all the things you can do with your time and with your money...what do you do with this most invaluable commodity? If you choose to go to Disneyland for example, you are going to spend about \$100.00 for a single ticket and you will stand in some very long lines...congratulations as you get a sunburn at the happiest place on earth! If you come to Church...without even necessarily putting a penny in the offering plate, you can receive the Word of Christ – more powerful than death – enter your ears, and your heart, and your mind. You will receive the forgiveness of your sins anew; you will receive eternal life anew again; you will be further equipped in His Word; and you will contribute to the family of faith by encouraging fellow Christians and supporting the most important mission on planet earth: to share the love of God through the saving Gospel to all people. He preaches to this day...to the rich and to the poor, but in a way that He is fully accessible. He is here. For free.

The Second Sign: The Risen Lord Jesus Christ INTERCEDES. And this is why you have complete assurance that your prayers are heard!

Johann Gerhard in his *Meditations on Divine Mercy* elaborates as to why you can have complete assurance that when you pray in faith, that your prayers are heard and answered by God. You know this quite simply because it is Jesus – the Risen Christ – who is praying for you:

“[We are assured] that God favorably hears our prayers [on account of] Christ’s intercession as our mediator. He is ‘at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us’ (Romans 8:34) and is our ‘advocate with the Father’ (1 John 2:1). What will the heavenly Father deny to His beloved Son? What will our gracious Savior not obtain by the power and merit of His satisfaction accomplished for us? The shrine of heaven stands open to Him. Christ delivers our prayers to the secret council of God. Will the Father not hear Him? Will He refuse anything to Him? Will He not hear Himself? Will He refuse Himself anything? The Father and the Son ‘are one’ (John 10:30). The Son is ‘at the Father’s side’ (John 1:18). And ‘the Father is in [Christ] and [Christ is] in the Father’ (John 10:38; 14:10). Christ our intercessor says to the Father, ‘I knew that You always hear Me’ (John 11:42). If Christ was heard by the Father while He walked the earth as God in the flesh, appearing in weakness in the state of humiliation (Philippians 2:7), the Father will certainly hear Christ now in His state of exaltation (Philippians 4:10) as He rules in all the glory of His majesty and as He exercises the full measure of His power.” (24)

The Third Sign: The Risen Lord Jesus Christ is in control of all things. He is the King of Kings and as Michael Panichi outlined in his confirmation statement of faith last Sunday, He is the King of the Kingdom of Power, the Kingdom of Grace, and the Kingdom of Glory...in summary He is the King of all. Soak in this truth: nothing...absolutely nothing can stop the promise that God has made for you: “All things [not a few things, not some things, not many things, not most things...but ALL things] work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose.” (Romans 8:28) The Risen Christ is quite simply in control...but not in order to brag about His power, but in order to bless His people. In order to bless you.

See the sign of His cross, see the sign of His power, see the sign of His resurrection...He is alive to bless you...see the signs...know His power: you are forgiven all your sins in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. And now nothing can take you from the hands of God. He is alive forever...and because you are joined to Him (this is what baptism and communion are for!) then you – YOU – are alive forever! And now may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus until He comes again in glory. In Jesus Name! Alleluia! Christ is Risen! [response] He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!

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