

Easter Sunday
April 20, 2014
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

Psalm 118:17, 21-24

I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the LORD has done. I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation. The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. (NIV)

This is the day! Did you ever wake up one morning and say or at least think that today is the day? Maybe it is your wedding day or your graduation day. It might be the day that your parents are finally taking you to see Disney World. Perhaps it is the day for the big game for you or your favorite team. It could be the day you are beginning your new job, the dream job you always wanted. There are some days that are bigger than others. I'm sure we have all had a morning where we woke up saying: "*this is the day!*"

For a pastor, or for any Christian for that matter, I believe today has to be the day. I don't know how any pastor can wake up on Easter morning and not say "this is the day!" There is none bigger. If I ever wanted to have a good sermon today is the day. The church is full. There are people here who have not been to church in some time. There are people here who are not normally here. I am very glad every one of you is here because today is the day.

I am also glad that the pressure isn't on me to have to come up with some entertaining and exciting message to win you over. All I have to do is proclaim the glorious truth that Christ is risen! The only job I have today is to try to get out of the way so that you can see that the stone has been rolled away and Jesus is no longer in the grave. The only thing left for me to do is point you to the overwhelming evidence that sin has been paid for, the devil has been crushed, and death has been swallowed up in victory. Today, I get to rejoice along with you in saying: "***I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the LORD has done.***" Yes, my Christian friends, there is no doubt about it – **This is the Day!**

The word of God before us simply states: "***This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.***" I believe this is one of the most common and well known refrains in the all of the psalms. It easily rolls off the tongue. Songs and hymns have been written based off this one verse. But to tell you the truth I actually like what the new NIV translation did with this verse. It may not be popular with the song writers, but I think it more accurately reflects what this section of the Bible is telling us. The NIV 2011 translates: "***The LORD has done it this very day; let us rejoice today and be glad.***" The Lord has won for us salvation. He has brought us life instead of death. The Lord has done it this very day! Christ has risen! He has risen indeed!

If you would like proof that you have been saved, if you want a guaranteed contract that salvation is yours, this is the day God gives it to you. Yes, the fact that Jesus has been raised from the dead is that important. So, of course, Satan works hard to plant doubt in people's minds of whether or not Jesus did ever come out of the grave. So take a moment to look at the evidence with me. For one, Jesus had enemies who were not going to allow the disciples to steal Jesus' body. That's why Pilate gave them the power to make the tomb as secure as they knew how. That is also why they placed temple guards to watch His grave. Those guards had a vested interest in making sure that Jesus' dead body continue to stay right there in that tomb. For those

guards knew very well how the Romans treated anyone who did not do their job. But none of that mattered for when the earthquake shook the ground and the angel rolled the stone away Jesus had already left. ***“He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay” (Matthew 28).***

I never knew this until I read about it this week, but did you know that twice they opened up the grave of President Abraham Lincoln to see if his body was still there? In 1887, twenty two years after the assassination, his coffin was dug up and opened because there were constant rumors that his body was not in the grave. There was even an attempted robbing that was detected and the people were caught. So they dug it up and the body was there. 14 years later they dug it up again. Both times witnesses were present who testified that the remains of Lincoln’s body were still in the grave.

Three days after the death of Jesus Christ, similar rumors began to spread throughout the land of Israel. Only this time there were no witnesses, not a single one, who could say that they had seen His body. In fact, to the contrary, many witnesses claimed to have seen Jesus out of His grave and even talked with Him after the resurrection. One time Jesus appeared to over 500 of His disciples. All the proof showed Jesus’ body was no longer there because He lives! Not only did Jesus give many convincing proofs that He was alive, but now He even had disciples who were willing to stake their own lives on it. Who would do that for a lie?

So Satan can try as he might, but this is the day - the day Jesus walked right over the top of the devil on His way out of His tomb – the day we can’t stop saying Alleluia! For Christ has risen. He has risen indeed. This is important because it proves Jesus is who He said He is – the Son of God. This is important because it means we can trust everything else Jesus tells us in His Word. This is important because it means that God accepted the payment Jesus made on the cross for our sins. It is important that Jesus lives because it means: ***“I will not die but live.”***

So as the psalmist writes, ***“The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes”***. This verse or part of this verse is quoted many times in the Bible. The stone the leaders of God’s visible church rejected has now become the foundation upon which God’s church is built. The One the religious leaders nailed to the cross and killed is the only one who now holds the Church of God together. The Church can be built on nothing else than faith in Christ. Since no one can lay any foundation for faith other than the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, this is the message you are going to hear at this church called Amazing Grace, not just today but, every week. My prayer is that those who have been here for any amount of time can testify that this is a church which clearly preaches Christ.

Where else would we want the focus? I suppose we could focus mainly on the children, after all they are the future. But if they were our focus we would soon find that our children do not always obey their parents. (Big surprise huh) They certainly do not always honor them. I could make all of you and your lives the primary focus of our message every week. I could maybe even provide you with rules each week to help you live better lives. But do you know what we would find? We would still find unfaithful friends, we would find church members who are not always so committed; we would see spouses who have failed each other, and employees who are lazy; we would see people who lie, gossip, and swear; we would see sinners who deserve nothing else but punishment and death from a righteous God.

That’s why here at Amazing Grace we preach Jesus. That’s why you and I need Jesus

every week, every day. Our salvation is based only upon His perfect life. We are saved only because Jesus was nailed to the cross with our every failure and sin. Our sins are paid for completely only because Jesus' blood has washed them all away. An eternal victory is ours only because Jesus has been raised from the dead. Jesus has become the capstone! ***"The LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes"***. So we too repeat the words of this psalm: ***"I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation"***.

A British minister by the name of W.E. Sangster found out he had an incurable disease that would cause his muscles to gradually waste away, his voice to fail, and eventually his throat would become unable to swallow. On Easter morning, just a few weeks before he died, he wrote a letter to his daughter. In it, he said, *"It is terrible to wake up on Easter morning and have no voice to shout, "He is risen!" -- but it would be still more terrible to have a voice and not want to shout."* I pray there never comes a day for any of us that we do not want to use our voices to say: ***"I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the LORD has done"***. Christ has risen. He has risen indeed.

Yes, this is the day! ***"This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."*** The Lord has done it this very day. Now we can say this not just on Easter, but every day. Each day is a day that you have been given salvation through Jesus' death and resurrection. Every day is a day you and I can wake up with sins forgiven and life with God. No matter how big the day or what awaits us we can say – this is the day. There is one last thing I want to add to your wedding or graduation day, the day of the big game, or the start of a new job. There will be another morning I want each of us to be able to say – this is the day. That is the day the Lord calls you home. That is the day that your death, because of Jesus, actually brings you life. Even then because our Savior lives, we will be able to say with joy today is the day. That is why I've said the hymn we are now going to stand and sing is a hymn I want people to sing at my funeral. **Awake my heart with gladness – see what today is done!** This is the day! Amen.