

*The LORD is my strength and my song;
he has become my salvation.*

¹⁵ *Shouts of joy and victory
resound in the tents of the righteous:
“The LORD’s right hand has done mighty things!
¹⁶ The LORD’s right hand is lifted high;
the LORD’s right hand has done mighty things!”*

¹⁷ *I will not die but live,
and will proclaim what the LORD has done.
¹⁸ The LORD has chastened me severely,
but he has not given me over to death.*

¹⁹ *Open for me the gates of righteousness;
I will enter and give thanks to the LORD.*

²⁰ *This is the gate of the LORD
through which the righteous may enter.*

²¹ *I will give you thanks, for you answered me;
you have become my salvation.*

²² *The stone the builders rejected
has become the capstone;*

²³ *the LORD has done this,
and it is marvelous in our eyes.*

²⁴ *This is the day the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it. (Psalm 118:14-24)*

This is the Day the Lord has Made!

Many years ago, when I was in the army, I was stationed at Field Station Augsburg in Germany. We lived on a different base than the one we worked on. So every morning, buses would run us from the barracks to our work site. While we rode, they played Armed Forces Radio. Every morning, the head chaplain for U.S. Army Europe would do a five minute devotion. He always ended it the same way: “This is the day the Lord has made. *Ennn-joy it!*” Obviously, he was quoting from the passage we’re using to celebrate Easter today. Certainly, there is a sense in which every day is a day that the Lord has made. Every day is a day for us to rejoice and be glad in. But when God inspired this psalm, he wasn’t thinking of just any day. Psalm 118 is one of the most prophetic chapters in the entire Old Testament. It’s a psalm about Holy Week. Again and again, Jesus himself speaks hundreds of years before he was born. He’s the one who says, “**This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.**” And what day was Jesus talking about? Today. Or rather, the day that we’re celebrating today: the first Easter. Jesus looked forward across the centuries. He saw his execution and death. Then he saw the most important day in all of history. He saw himself rise from the dead. We see it, too. My friends, **this is the day the Lord has made!**

I.

Let us rejoice over Christ’s victory! Jesus invites us to do that, this morning. It’s really easy for us to forget that Jesus had real emotions. The gospels are so focused on him serving others that we don’t see his emotions much in the Easter accounts. We see Jesus comforting the women who trudged out to his tomb that morning, not to greet the risen Christ, but to make sure that he had a proper burial. The gospels tell us that they got up before the sun rose to make that trip. They went out to wash a battered, dead body and arrange it for its final rest. As they made that long, sad walk, they worried about who would open the tomb. They knew it had

been sealed with a large boulder. They probably also knew that Pilate had sent soldiers to guard that tomb and make sure that no one stole the body. But they had no thought of a resurrection.

But when they got to the tomb, it was open. An angel had rolled the stone away. Now, he didn't do that so Jesus could get out. Jesus was already gone. He did that to show the world that the tomb was empty. The ladies bent down and went inside. There in the darkness, they met an angel who rebuked them: "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here. He's risen, just as he told you!" As they fled from the tomb in terror and in joy, Jesus himself appeared to them. They fell on their faces and worshipped him.

But it's their sadness and their terror and their joy that we see. The gospels don't actually tell us what Jesus felt. Nor do they tell us what Jesus felt when he confronted Mary Magdalene. They tell us that she stood there weeping because her Lord was dead and someone had stolen the body. They tell us that she didn't even recognize Jesus until he said her name. They show us his love and his willingness to comfort. But again, they don't show us his joy. The same could be said about his appearance to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and to the disciples who were gathered in the upper room with the doors locked. Again and again, we see the disciples' grief turned into joy. But the gospels tell us little or nothing of Jesus' feelings. Maybe that's because God had already revealed those feelings in Psalm 118, centuries before Jesus lived them.

Jesus said: "**The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.**" "**The LORD's right hand has done mighty things!**" "**I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the LORD has done.**" Those are amazing things for Jesus to say, aren't they? He felt faith. He felt trust in his Father. He felt joy in the works of God! He gave his Father the credit for his victory. Most of the time, the Bible says that God the Father raised Jesus. But it does also specifically say that the Holy Spirit raised him. Jesus even pointed out that he would raise himself. Why does he focus so much on his Father? Because he was a real human being. The Son of God came down here and took on real flesh so that he could live our lives. And die our death. Because he was a real human being, he needed to be raised, even while as God he could raise himself. Because he was a real human being, he felt everything that we feel— at least all the things that aren't sinful. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus felt all that we feel as he stared death in the face. So Jesus celebrated when he triumphed over death. He felt what we're going to feel when we rise from the dead. He felt what our loved ones in heaven feel right now because they have triumphed over death.

But there's more. Jesus said, "**The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.**" Part of our victory is being vindicated. All the enemies of Christ will finally have to acknowledge that his way really is the only one that matters. Well, Jesus felt that, too. He was the stone the builders rejected. The builders were the spiritual leaders of Israel. They were supposed to be building God's house – the Church of the Old Testament. But when their Savior finally came, they rejected him. They looked at the stone God gave them and they didn't think it was good enough. They didn't want a traveling preacher. They didn't want a carpenter's son who would let himself be arrested and tortured and crucified. They wanted a king. They didn't want someone who just forgave sins. They wanted a hero who would drive the Romans out and, by the way, thank them for all they had done for God.

So they rejected Jesus. They hated his wisdom. They mocked his claims. They plotted and whispered and as soon as they got the chance, they murdered him. They even bribed those soldiers that Pilate sent out to guard the tomb. Those soldiers saw the angel come down and open the already empty tomb. But Jesus' enemies got them to say that they fell asleep and his disciples stole his body. Even after they knew he had risen, they rejected him. But in that resurrection, God vindicated Jesus. God showed that every one of Jesus' claims was true. He was the promised Messiah. He was the King Israel had been waiting for all these centuries. He was the Lord who has the power to forgive sins and the power to raise the dead. God made him the capstone, the pinnacle of the house he's building here.

God the Father raised Jesus to show the world that he, the Father, was satisfied with all that Jesus had done. All our sins are paid for. God the Father raised Jesus to show the world that we, too, will rise and live. Jesus could only rejoice in what his Father had done. He called us to recognize that that first Easter was, indeed, the day the Lord had made. It was a new day that changed the world forever. He calls us to rejoice and be glad in it, now and forever.

II.

That shows us just how much our Savior loves us. He didn't need to win this victory for himself. He's the Son of God. He was going to live in heaven forever, whether we were there or not. He didn't need to put

on human flesh, to be born in a stable, to grow up as a carpenter's son. He certainly didn't need to be rejected of the Jewish people, or mocked, or beaten, or scourged or to have a crown of thorns shoved down on his head. He could've lived in heaven forever without ever being nailed to a cross or dying there. He did all that for us.

This is the day the Lord has made! Let us rejoice that it's our victory!

Most people like to win. My wife loves to play games. Before we got married, she probably imagined that we would play cards or board games on a regular basis for the rest of our lives together. But we don't. Do you know why? She always wins. Once in a while, I want to win. But I don't want to feel like she's letting me win. It's tough, isn't it? Jesus was happy to win. But for him, it wasn't because of the selfish pride that makes it hard for me to lose. For him, the real joy was in the fact that we won. His victory is ours. That's why all through this psalm, Jesus is speaking. But again and again, he says "we" and "us" and "our." Because he understands how completely true it is that we can only win when he does.

Why is that true? Because we're all born sinners. That's the reality that Jesus came down here to deal with. It's the grief and the sadness that makes Easter necessary. But it's also what makes Easter joyful. Maybe I can compare it to going to the hospital for surgery. Imagine for a moment that your doctor discovered something serious and scary: cancer, heart disease, whatever. He sends you to a surgeon. They sit down with you and tell you need this operation. So you spend the next few weeks on pins and needles, waiting for the day to come. The night before, you don't eat or drink anything after midnight. And you probably don't sleep very much, either. As they're prepping you, the nurse or the doctor runs through all the risks for this surgery. And you try to stay calm. But man, those risks are hard to hear. Finally, they put you under.

The next thing you know, you're opening your eyes in recovery. When you're clear enough to understand, that doctor comes in and tells you it was a complete success. You're going to be fine. You need a few weeks to recover. But you're going to get your life back. At that moment, what do you care more about: the fact that you were sick or the fact that you're now better? Isn't it the fact that you're better? Don't you rejoice to hear that your surgery was a success? But you wouldn't rejoice over that success without understanding how sick you really were.

One of the hard things about being a pastor is that people don't like to hear how sick we are. We're sinners. That means we daily and deliberately disobey God. The only possible result of our lifetime of sin and disobedience is death and hell. Well, today we rejoice. Today is the day that God wheels us out of the spiritual operating room and tells us we're rescued. Sure, we have a period of weakness and recovery that we call life on this earth. But we are going to live! But to appreciate that, we have to understand that we needed it. Jesus knew that better than anyone. He was the Son of God who chose to live among sinners because he loved those sinners. He never stopped striving to save them – to save us. The devil did everything he could to stop Jesus. Jesus' enemies threw every monkey wrench in his path that they could lay their hands on. And the truth is, every day of our lives, we sin and do our best to get Jesus to just give up on us. But he doesn't and he won't. He went to the cross. He died. He paid. And he rose. The angel told those women, "He is not here. He has risen, just as he said he would." At that moment, God was announcing to the world that we won.

That victory means that we will live with Jesus in heaven. That victory means that these bodies will rise from the dead and God will remake this world and we will be perfect forever in a perfect world. That victory means that all tears and sorrow will end and death itself will die. That victory means that all our sin is forgiven. Today is the day that we celebrate that victory. This is the day the Lord has made, the day we celebrate the greatest day that we will see before Judgment Day. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. Amen.