

## **“Victorious and free!” (1 Corinthians 15:19-26)**

“If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first-fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Christ has risen! He has risen, indeed!

This is the greetings, the shocking, our experience-defeating, the new-beginning announcing greeting that originated on that first Easter Sunday, almost two millennia ago. This is how Christians have been greeting one another for thousands of years, at once announcing what happened and proclaiming what is to happen.

This is how hundreds of millions of Christians greet one another today, this is how we proclaim the most important piece of Biblical message, the very heart of what we call the Gospel, the Good News.

Christ has risen! He has risen indeed!

But why is this so important, so crucial for us? Let’s reflect on it. **First – what does the resurrection of Jesus change? Second, why is it so difficult to believe it? And, third, what exactly does the resurrection of Jesus mean for us?**

**First, what does the resurrection of Jesus change?** It changes everything, it turns our lives upside down and makes what we thought impossible possible.

It means that God the Creator has acted in our history, that He has done what He had promised long ago, that He has intervened and in Christ’s resurrection He has launched the next stage of His project for us, that is, His New Creation.

He has given us a glimpse of what He is up to in the age to come. And He has done it in front on hundreds and hundreds of surprised and overjoyed eyewitnesses. He has shown that He is in control over everything in His creation, even over life and death, and that “what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, our God has prepared for those who love him.” (1 Cor 2:9)

Jesus’ resurrection changes how we think about our God, how we think about this created world, how we think about ourselves, the meaning and purpose of our lives, it

changes our future hope, it makes everything much greater, so much more magnificent and wonderful, it expands our reality and fills with colours and love our lives.

Jesus' resurrection transfers us into a different reality, where everything is in the hands of the Triune God, in whose eyes you are more loved and more significant than you can ever imagine, where the Creator unites Himself with His creation to be closer to you.

Where He makes you and calls you His children, where He guides the whole history and all His creative activity toward the ultimate goal, the New Creation – where you will be made like God's Son Jesus, where you will dwell with Him in your new resurrected bodies, and where you will see Him as He is.

That is not our idea, not at all! That's the Father's revealed hope for us, for you. How does it sound? I know, it is difficult to believe that this could be true. It sounds too great, too distant from how we experience this world, too unbelievable.

**That was our second question – why it is so difficult to believe** God's promises with our whole hearts? The answer is – because we live in prison. In spiritual bondage.

Our minds and hearts are walled from this wonderful reality, even if deep in our hearts we still long for it. This has been our state since the beginning. Since the Fall, since our fore-father Adam lost it, since death came into this world.

But then, what constitutes this prison? How does it work? Let's see. We all are born without the knowledge of God, we don't know Him, we don't know His loving and gracious heart, and we actually don't want to know Him.

We prefer to believe that we ourselves are like little gods, self-sufficient and in control over our little lives. The Bible calls it sin, our sinful condition, it is like a lid that keeps us separated from our God, pressed down, and we can't remove it on our own.

We are also locked into time, stuck into this short period that separates our birth from our death. That's where our lives go by. Cut off from our Creator, seeing our life passing by and inevitably running out. Death is the dreadful enemy we can't even dream to defeat; therefore, many have accepted it as a part of natural order of things.

Thirdly, the Word of God speaks about dark spiritual powers and forces that guard this prison. They make sure that our eyes and hearts are focused on our lives inside this prison, on ourselves, so that we are distracted and easily controlled, unable open our eyes and hearts to the grandeur of God's reality.

These three explain why we as human beings are so fixed on this life, this world, whatever is important at this moment in this culture. For we are imprisoned by these powers. Since the Fall that is our, we could say, natural state.

Natural state for humanity. But it shouldn't be so for Christians. No! Not for those who call the Risen Jesus their Lord and God. As Paul the apostle puts it: "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied."

Sadly, but even Christians struggle with this. Too often we have hope in this life only. Let's examine ourselves! What do you pray and hope for? Do you pray that the Father embraces you in His new reality, do you pray for life with the Triune God in its fullness, or that He would simply help you to make through and to fulfill your plans for this life?

I don't know how you experience this, but for me this is an ongoing struggle. It often feels like I could happily entrust myself and my life in the hands of this God, if only... if only I could be sure that His plans and hopes for my life matches mine.

It is so difficult to let the steering wheel go, to entrust ourselves to God our Father, for there is so much that we want in this life, and wouldn't it be nice, if our God just helped us to make it happen.

How about you? What do you hope for in Christ? What do you expect from Him?

Have you wondered, why would Paul say that if we hope in Christ in this life only, "we are of all people most to be pitied"? Because it means that we are missing out on the grandeur of the Resurrection message, on the very heart of Biblical message.

Then we have misunderstood the cosmic and eternal significance of Jesus' resurrection. Then we have made Him our servant, a genie-god who will fulfill our wishes, another supplement to our spiritual diet, who will help us to find self-fulfillment, or will lift our self-esteem, or will make us happier, or whatever we hope for in this world.

We are missing the grand picture – through the mystery of His death and resurrection, Jesus Christ has celebrated an absolute triumph over everything. He is the Lord of lords and the King of kings. He has won the victory over all the powers and forces of darkness, including over our mightiest enemies – over sin and death and devil.

He is in charge. "He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them..." (Col 2:15) And now everything has been given to the Risen Jesus by His Father; He has received all the authority in heaven and on earth. The Kingdom is His. The glory is His. The power is His. The future is His.

**And do you know what this means for us?** That was our third question. Great, great news! Who are you? How does the Bible speak about the disciples of Jesus? You are the body of Christ. Yes, you are united with Jesus, God's Eternal Son, with the most intimate bond, by the Holy Spirit indwelling in you. As Jesus and the Father are one, so we are one with the Triune God.

Which means, you participate in whatever happens to Jesus. He is the first-fruits of what is to come. Jesus was raised from the dead in the power of the Holy Spirit; death couldn't hold Him in the tomb. You have received the same Holy Spirit, so you will be raised just as Jesus was, death will have no power over you.

Jesus is the true Son of God, and you are God's adopted children, beloved brothers and sisters of Jesus. By the way, this is how we are to see one another and treat one another – as precious and dearly loved little brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus.

He is the heir of God the Father, you, being children of God, are co-heirs with Christ. He will reign over this New Creation, and you will reign with Him. That is our ultimate destiny, that is our Father's hope for us. That is what resurrection means for us.

This hope, grounded in God's promises and in the resurrection of Jesus – it is larger and more wonderful that we can comprehend, that's why our feeble minds struggle with disbelief and doubts, whatever smart we may be. Thanks to our Father who keeps sending His Spirit to help us to embrace His promises and rejoice in them!

But ... some may object that this sounds like a big pie in the sky. One strange event, resurrection, that leads to other unrealistic hopes. It's true that our greatest hope is not in this world, but in the one to come.

However, the resurrection of Jesus changes everything already now. Because Jesus was raised from the dead, triumphant, victorious and free, you too are victorious and free already here, on this side of eternity. What does that mean for you?

The forces of darkness have lost their power over you. Hear this! Jesus is the light of the world. With His resurrection the light of the New Creation has dawned. Think about it – there is no darkness so powerful that it could remain in the presence of light.

If we dwell in darkness, there is nothing in us that can make it go away, whatever intensely we flex, but as soon as we have light, the smallest of lights, all the darkness retreats. The same is true in spiritual sense – on our own we are helpless against the dark spiritual forces who prey on us, we may not even be aware of them, and we most certainly don't have resources in us to overcome them.

Now, as you are united with Jesus, you have God's light, His Spirit in you. He has made you the light to the world. You have received this life-giving light in your baptism, and you keep receiving it whenever you hear or read the Word of God, and you are fed this light and divine life in the Lord's Supper.

This changes everything. Already in this life. By being welcomed into God's family, you have joined Jesus in the triumphant procession, bringing the light to the world that sinks in darkness. You have received not a small task – the light of life, the message of Jesus' resurrection has been entrusted to you, to proclaim it boldly, to hold this light

high so that it shines far and wide. What happens as we do that? Those who sit in darkness see this great light, their chains of sin are broken, they are set free, the Kingdom of God grows and there is great joy as we welcome new brothers and sisters.

This is what the message of Jesus' resurrection does. When we proclaim it, when people hear it, when the Holy Spirit brings it to their very hearts, the lid of sin that separated them from the Triune God is blown away. They are overjoyed to be embraced by God as His beloved and to receive the new life with the Triune God!

As God's message shines forth through us, the boundaries set by death are broken down and removed, and the forces of darkness are sent into retreat. Death can't control us anymore by fear; it can't set anymore the boundary how far we can go.

When this happens, our hope is not tied to this life only anymore. We know what our future holds, even if we still can't fully picture how splendid, how glorious it will be. Jesus' resurrection has provided for us a glimpse of what it to come.

This is what the resurrection of Jesus is about. It changes everything, already in this life. It brings us victory and hope and freedom, and it makes us participants in Jesus' triumphal procession, it makes you the light to this world.

I pray that the Holy Spirit would help us to comprehend the magnitude of what the Great News of Jesus' resurrection mean for us and rejoice in it! So that we all, victorious and free, are filled with God's light so richly that the forces of darkness and the fear of death are forced to retreat, and all whom God has placed in our lives are drawn to this light, embrace the divine freedom, joy and hope of new life with Jesus.

Let's proclaim that Jesus has risen and let His light shine!

Christ has risen! Christ has risen, indeed!

Amen.