

The Angel's Consolatory Easter-Sermon: "Be Not Affrighted."

An Easter Sermon Preached by
the Reverend Professor C. F. W. Walther, D.D., in 1868.

I. N. I.

Lord Jesus, Thou wast once the Servant of servants, but now Thou sittest as the Lord of lords on the throne of Thy Father; once Thou wast delivered unto the will of Thine enemies, but now all power is given unto Thee in heaven and on earth; all enemies that once mocked Thee, must now tremble in Thy presence. O Thou victorious Hero, Lord of glory, Prince of life risen today, we bow today and make obeisance at the seat of Thy glory and humbly adore Thee as our God and Lord, as our Savior and Redeemer, and beseech Thee, draw also us by the tidings of Thy glorious resurrection out of the graves of our death, our sin, our fear and anxiety after Thee, and impart to us the spoils of grace, comfort, joy and happiness which Thou hast brought from Thy grave for all those that believe in Thee. Let us experience in our hearts that Thou art dead no longer, but livest and rulest. And we will be eternally Thine own, and live under Thee in Thy kingdom, and serve Thee in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. Amen, and Amen.

In Christ, our risen Savior, beloved hearers:

The sensation which the news of Christ's resurrection from the dead once caused with the enemies of Christ, especially with the High Priests, must have been of an extremely bewildering nature. Undoubtedly they had condemned Christ unto death with an evil conscience, and strongly conscious of their guilt, moved Pontius Pilate by threats to confirm and execute their sentence of death. But when they had seen Christ bleeding away His life on the cross, apparently as a feeble man, then their consciences went fully to sleep again, and they were now wholly persuaded that Jesus must, after all, have been an imposter and their sentence right. But lo, what happens! On the third day after Christ's crucifixion there appeared suddenly in the hour of early dawn the keepers of the sepulchre before the chief priests, and, pallid and shaking with fear, show them how there was a great earthquake, and how a wonderful young man appeared, whose countenance was like lightning, and how he came and rolled back the stone from the sepulchre's

door; that thereupon they fell down as dead men, and when awakened again, the sepulchre had been empty and the Crucified disappeared. "He that was crucified by us, is risen from the dead!" This intelligence must have sounded in their ears as the trump of final judgment! Yet they remain hardened. Though they now clearly understand, that they are murderers of God's own Son, yet they feel in their hardened hearts no emotion of repentance. They had too often resisted the Holy Spirit wilfully, therefore now the very evidence of the resurrection of their Messiah could not bring them to faith in Him. Even this most blessed fact becomes unto them a savor of death unto death. Servile fear is the only emotion that therewith seizes the wretches. In manifest Satanic delusion they, therefore, only meditate upon rescuing their honor before men, at least, by spreading the most preposterous falsehoods. The risen Lord, does, indeed, not appear to them visibly, because He could now have appeared to them, as His hardened enemies, only unto judgment, which judgment, however, will first take place on the day revealing all His glory. But because the risen Lord does not appear unto them, they infer that He already left the earth, and that they, therefore, are forever freed of His loathsome presence and activity. Yet the resurrection day of Him whom they had murdered was and remained the most dreadful of their lives. Never again did they attain to an undisturbed quiet. As often as they heard that the apostles preached to the people of the resurrection of the Crucified, they were startled with fright, and dared not for this reason to kill the apostles also, but only threatened them to speak henceforth to no man in this name.

Behold the effect which the Easter-tidings produce even this day in all unbelievers! They know, if Christ is risen, then their unbelief is madness, a fighting against the Almighty, a wilful rejection of all salvation in this world and in the world to come; they know, if Christ, according to His prediction, has arisen from the dead, then Christianity is irrefutably established; then the Bible is the word of God and Christ God's Son and the Savior of the world; but then those who nevertheless reject Him, are of all men most miserable, for they are lost forever. This they know; for what else could move them to reject the resurrection of Christ as a fable? Their reason, indeed, does not furnish them the least argument for so doing. Their reason, on the contrary, tells them if Christ had not arisen, then it would have been impossible for His timid disciples to go forth after His crucifixion into all the world in such a death-defying manner, to preach the gospel of Christ to every creature; it would have been impossible that through their sermons of the

Crucified, hundreds of thousands should have been brought to faith in Christ, that hundreds of thousands in unyielding faith should have died, to verify this fact, the cruel martyr's death, and that the Church of Christ should have remained for a space of more than eighteen centuries unto this hour, though the combined powers of this world warred against her. They know Christ can, therefore, be dead no longer; He must live, live in millions of hearts; He must rule, govern and protect His own from the throne of His divine majesty. Of all this the unbelievers are informed by their reason. There can be but one cause which moves them to deny Christ's resurrection, to wit: the clear conviction that if they accept the resurrection of Christ, the whole fabric of their unbelief will topple like a house of cards, that thereby they condemn themselves, that the Easter-shouts of the Christians are woeful cries over all unbelievers; that Christ's victory over death and hell is also a victory over them; that Christ's liberty is their bondage, Christ's honor is their shame, Christ's life is their death, Christ's glorification their condemnation. This, and this alone, answers the question why all unbelievers try to persuade themselves that Christ's resurrection were a fable.

Alas, my beloved, what a startling fact it is that even on this very day men are still found to whom the tidings, "The Lord is risen," should be terrible news! Surely it is the most joyful and blessed news that was ever proclaimed on earth, preached only for this purpose to all men, to remove all fear, to turn all sorrow into gladness, all wailing into exultation, all care into blessed hope, all misery into glory. This, then, shall be the topic which I will now discourse.

Gospel: Mark 16:1-8: And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint Him. And very early in the morning, the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun. And they said among themselves, "Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?" And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away; for it was very great. And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted. And he saith unto them, "Be not affrighted; ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified; He is risen; He is not here; behold the place where they laid Him. But go your way, tell His disciples and Peter that He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him, as He said unto you." And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed; neither said they anything to any

man; for they were afraid.

When, my beloved, the angel announced to the shepherds of Bethlehem the birth of the Savior, then he first said unto them, “Fear not!” The same salutation we hear again today from the lips of the angel who announced the resurrection of Christ to the women who had come to the sepulchre. For the first words he spake unto them were, as our text states, “Be not affrighted!” To this first Easter salutation of the heavenly messenger let us now direct our whole attention whilst I expound to you:

THE ANGEL’S CONSOLATORY EASTER SERMON: “BE NOT AFFRIGHTED.”

We contemplate:

1. Whereupon it is founded;
2. To whom it is addressed, and
3. How it accomplishes what it was sent for.

I.

“Be not affrighted.” Thus rang forth the Easter-sermon which once the first Easter-preacher, sent by God from on High, must deliver at the sepulchre of Christ. O consolatory sermon! It could by no means be more consolatory. For when God has sinners told, “Be not affrighted,” it means nothing else than this: “You sinners certainly think, when a messenger of God approaches you, you cannot help becoming affrighted; for what else may you expect than that I, as a holy and just God, will have you summoned to My judgment and have My displeasure pronounced against you? But lo! My Easter-messenger has a different charge; he is rather to inform you that you be *not* affrighted. Whatever might move you to be affrighted, be it your sins, be it the threatenings of the law, be it the temptations, dangers and tribulations of the world, be it death, be it the holy God’s judgment, hell and condemnation: ‘Be not affrighted’ in the least, fear nothing, be of good cheer, be comforted, be joyful. All reason for whatever fear and sorrow has vanished; you have only reason for joy and hope.”

And what is it, my beloved, whereby the first, heavenly Easter-preacher establishes his consolatory sermon? He himself adds this as a reason: “Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was

crucified; He is risen.” It is, therefore, in short, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who was crucified, whereupon the holy angel founds his consolatory Easter-sermon.

How is it, then? Is this really a sufficient reason to banish all fears from our hearts?

Yea, my beloved. Many, indeed, think the whole import of Christ’s resurrection to be, thereby to place the immortality of our souls and the coming resurrection of our bodies beyond doubt; but, firm a foundation as the resurrection of Christ is for our faith in these points, this is the least fruit of that glorious fact. This implies something infinitely greater and grander. Observe it well; the angel does not only say, “Christ is risen!” but “*Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified, is risen,*” and thereby indicates that Christ’s resurrection is most intimately connected with His crucifixion; that only because Christ has first been crucified, His resurrection were of such unfailingly sweet significance. If Christ’s crucifixion was the depth of His strife and combat, then His resurrection was His victory and triumph. But as Christ, when He was crucified, did not suffer for His sins and fight, thus He also, when He rose from the dead, victoriously conquered not His sins, not His death, not His hell, in short, not His enemies, but all men’s sins, all men’s death, all men’s hell, in brief, all men’s enemies. His resurrection was, therefore, all men’s resurrection, His thereby acquired justification all men’s justification, His life all men’s life, His liberty all men’s liberty, His victory all men’s victory, and the heaven taken by Him, the everlasting fatherland taken for all men. How is it, then? Was this, therefore, not sufficient reason for the angel’s sermon: “Be not affrighted?” Yes, indeed! What could now yet, after Christ’s resurrection, be a cause of fear and terror? May it be sin? True, Christ, laden with our sins, must ascend the cross and descend into the grave; but look yonder, the grave is empty, Christ, rid of the burden of our sins, shouts the cry of victory, and all our sins are buried and gone. Or should the threatenings of the divine law still be a cause of fear and fright? True, Christ was put under the law for us, and because of it cast into the prison of transgressors; but lo! His prison opened itself again to Him; He is free; the law, therefore, has received satisfaction. Or were it the world with its temptations, dangers and tribulations? True, the world nailed Christ as the Lamb of God which bore the sins of the world, to the cross; but lo! as Lion He is risen again, has conquered the world for His own, and sitting on the heavenly throne, made it His footstool. Or could it be death? True, Christ suffered Himself to be swallowed by death for our sake; but when death swallowed Him, Christ as the Life eternal proved a poison for death, which strangled

it. Or might it be Satan and his hosts of hell, before whom we must still tremble? True, Satan, the old serpent, killed Christ by bruising His heel; but this same bruised heel, when resuscitated, bruised his head, making him powerless for all that unite with Christ. Or must we, at length, be affrighted at God's judgment on the final day, at hell and condemnation? True, Christ was once condemned not only by men, but instead of all men by God Himself; but behold! God Himself also raised Him again, and thereby acquitted not only Him, but all whose surety and substitute He was, of all guilt and temporal and eternal punishment. Christ's death and burial are therefore the death and burial of all our distress; Christ's life and resurrection, however, the quickening and rising of all our salvation. Where, then, is there still a reason for fear and affright to be found? Every reason thereto has now vanished. "*Be not affrighted, Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified for you, is risen!*" Thus now the blessed angels cry out from heaven unto us miserable sinners sojourning in the vale of sorrows, and our answer thereto must be: Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

Black hell and all its forces
May harm me not a hair;
At sin I mock, law's curses
May ne'er make me despair;
Grim death with all its might –
I fairly do deride
His image numb and cold
Though He make e'er so bold.

The world I laugh at boldly,
Its anger fierce and scorn,
Its chafing and allurements
Are labors lost and lorn,
Afflictions mayn't afflict
My soul, nor joy restrict,
Distress is my redress,
Gloom ushers blessedness.

II.

But, my beloved, now the important question arises: Who are they, to whom that first consolatory Easter-sermon, "*Be not affrighted*," is addressed? The answer to this question let us now seek in the second place.

The first answer which our text furnishes us, is manifestly this: Not to all men is that consolatory Easter-sermon addressed. For though the angel spake the kind words "*Be not affrighted*," to the women that had come to the grave, when they were affrighted at his sight; yet he had shortly before addressed anything but words of comfort to the rude keepers of the sepulchre: and though also the chief priests are seized by horrible fright at the intelligence of Christ's certain resurrection, yet the angel does not hasten to them, to salute them also with the words, "*Be not affrighted*," but abandons them to their misery and all torments of their evil consciences. How, then, is the consolatory Easter-sermon only intended for the pious, the faithful, who know of no guilt, who have merited by their pious lives to be rewarded therefor with temporal and eternal joy?

Let us learn this of the persons to whom the angel of God delivered that comforting sermon at Christ's sepulchre, and of those persons to whom they should repeat the sermon which had been in the first place addressed to them. The former were the three women: Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome, the mother of Zebedee's children; the latter were the disciples, among whom Peter is especially mentioned.

What kind of persons were all these? Of Mary Magdalene we know, that Christ had cast seven devils out of her; and of Salome, the mother of Zebedee's children, we know, that she had once ambitiously asked Christ to let her two sons sit, the one on His right hand, and the other on His left, in His kingdom; and finally, of the disciples we know, that they all had been, in Christ's greatest sufferings, offended because of Him, and had forsaken Him, yea, that the very Peter who is specially mentioned, had denied Christ thrice in the most shameful and disgraceful manner. We learn, therefore, all were poor, great sinners, worthy of no grace, of no comfort, of no temporal and eternal joy. And as regards their very faith matters were in a precarious condition. Christ had predicted so clearly, that He would rise on the third day after His death. But this promise was forgotten. The good women rather approach the sepulchre in order to anoint His body and thus, O, unbelief! protect it against corruption, and the disciples concealed themselves

timidly with doors shut, abandoning all hope of Christ's resurrection, and therewith of salvation and bliss.

What was it, then, which still distinguished them so essentially from the keepers of the sepulchre, and from the chief priests, that yet the consolatory Easter-sermon was addressed to them, whilst those [others] remained abandoned to their fright?

In two things, mainly, did both the women that came to the sepulchre, and the beloved disciples differ from the keepers of the sepulchre and the chief priests. First in this respect: though they had suffered Christ's word and promise of His resurrection to be wrested from their hearts, yet they had not rejected Christ's word as a lie, but continued to believe it to be truth; that they, notwithstanding the offence by which they had been offended because of Christ's death, did, however, not unite with Christ's enemies, but kept themselves away and separated from them, and that they still continued in their own fellowship. The second point of difference lay in the fact that the keepers of the sepulchre and the chief priests hardened themselves in their sins, whilst the women and the disciples even for this reason were so sad and sorrowful, wept and lamented so, because they thought to have lost in Christ's death on the cross the Redeemer, the Savior from their sins. As the disciples which went to Emmaus expressly state, they were so sad for this reason, because Jesus had been crucified, but they had trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel. Now to have no longer a Savior from their sins, this was the dreadful thought which worried them, this was the burden which bore heavier, than the stone on the door of Christ's sepulchre, on their griefstricken hearts. Because they knew their sins and experienced such deep sorrow for them, therefore there had died unto them with Christ all hope of redemption and salvation.

Behold, my beloved, who accordingly the men are to whom alone the first consolatory Easter-sermon, "*Be not affrighted,*" is addressed. We number among them in the first place only those who despite of all offenses of their reason and heart believe Christ's Word to be incontestable truth, separate themselves from the unbelieving world which crucifies Christ in His Word, and make fellowship with those who adhere to Christ in His Word. In the second place we may number among them only such also as not only acknowledge themselves poor and lost sinners, but are also grieved and full of sorrow on account of their sins; all such as look upon the state of being without a Redeemer as the most dreadful state in this life, but consider the fact of having a

Savior from their sins the supreme happiness, the supreme good, the supreme longing of their souls thirsting for peace.

To those among you, who continue to let their reason or heart judge the Word of Christ; who still put a difference between the Word of God, receiving one part because it agrees with their hearts, and rejecting the other, and therefore like the chief priests blaspheme Christ by their actions as an impostor, though they extol Him in words; or those among you who do not know themselves as lost sinners, who sorrow on account of many other distresses, only not on account of the distress which sin causes; who fear many evils, but only not hell, and are affrighted at many things, only not at God's displeasure, do hunger and thirst after thousand earthly goods, only not after the grace of God: to you the consolatory Easter-sermon is not addressed, if today the first Easter-preacher would appear to you, he would indeed not proclaim to you, "*Be not affrighted,*" but rather: "Be affrighted!" For what we sing in a communion hymn, "If anguish ne'er thy heart hath rent, be not thy knee there vainly bent," obtains also in respect to Christ's resurrection. For unto all that are wise in their own conceits, unto all the self-righteous, unto all secure and vain hearts of the world, unto all the lovers of things terrestrial and servants of sin these wells of comfort will become nothing but a savor of death unto death.

But unto you who feel heavy at heart and troubled on account of your sins; you, who lament and weep over the burden of sin which bears on your souls like the stone bore on the door of Christ's sepulchre, who mourn that Jesus which was crucified, still rests as dead in the tomb of your hearts; you who account yourselves blind in matters pertaining to salvation and, for this reason, seek all your wisdom in Christ's Word; you, who know yourselves as lost sinners and therefore long for but one thing, even to have a Savior from your sins; you who chant the Psalm: "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee, O Jesus, my Savior and Mercy Seat!" – to you, to you, and though you be chief of all sinners, this consolatory Easter-sermon is proclaimed, "*Be not affrighted,* the Lord is risen!" No cause for fear and sadness remaineth, but only cause for all joy and blessed hope.

III.

Now you will ask, what must we do? In order to answer this question also, let me briefly show you in the third place, how the consolatory Easter-sermon accomplishes what it was sent

for.

Consulting our text also on this point, we find that the angel of the Lord, after having announced his consolatory Easter-sermon to the sorrowing women, particularly charged them with three things. The first is implied in the words, "*Behold the place where they laid Him,*" whereby the angel manifestly asked them but this, to convince themselves of the truth of the resurrection, to entertain no doubt concerning it, but to receive it in firm faith. The second charge is implied in the words following, "*But go your way, tell His disciples and Peter.*" Whereof they themselves, therefore, attained to a firm conviction of faith, this they should not conceal with silence in their hearts, but communicate it also to others and talk of it with them. Finally, the angel charges them to go into Galilee, and adds, "*There shall ye see Him, as He said unto you.*" Christ, namely, had given His disciples in the very night of His sufferings the promise, "*After I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee.*" To this word, accordingly, they should adhere, this word they should follow, then their yet feeble faith would become strengthened and gloriously established.

Here, then, we have three requirements which must be complied with, if the consolatory Easter-sermon, "*Be not affrighted,*" is to accomplish what it was sent for.

The first requirement is, therefore, that we banish all doubts in regard to Christ's resurrection from our hearts, and apprehend it in full faith. But this is not done by merely accepting without a doubt the historical fact of Christ's resurrection, but by believing in the blessed result of the same, if we, namely, believe that God thereby acquitted also us of our sins, that God thereby declared also unto us: "Thou art reconciled, thou art redeemed, thou art just!", that thereby also our death was swallowed up in victory, that our hell was destroyed, that also unto us heaven is opened. Whoever lets his sin and unworthiness hinder him to believe this, to him the consolatory Easter-sermon has been preached in vain.

But, my beloved, if a man has learned, through the grace of God, to believe this, then he must not conceal this faith in his heart. He must rather say with David: "I believed, therefore I have spoken." As a spark of fire, when it is so covered up as to be unable to kindle, must soon be smothered and extinguished, thus also the divine spark of faith is smothered and extinguished, if it be kept concealed in the heart. But as the feeblest spark may with sufficient air kindle and emit a bright and inextinguishable blaze, thus it is an illustrious means to kindle even the feeblest

spark of faith to a bright flame of faith which can be extinguished by no torrent of temptation, if believers talk with believers of the things that move their believing hearts. We learn this among other things of the disciples that went to Emmaus, after having communed with the Lord, without knowing Him, of His resurrection, they afterward said one to the other, “Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures?”

But, my beloved, to all this a third must be added. As, indeed, the women and disciples, after having attained to faith by the consolatory Easter-sermon, were summoned for the purpose of being maintained and strengthened in their faith, to seek and await the risen Lord in Galilee where His word had directed them; thus all those who have attained to faith through the Easter-sermon, must make all additional days of their lives so many Easter-days, and continue to seek the risen Lord and the blessed power of His resurrection where He now has promised to let Himself be found by us, namely in His Word.

Up, then; all of you, my dear hearers! who have come to this church today as those women to Christ’s sepulchre: sin-stricken, heavy and troubled at heart, but full of longing for a Savior from your sins. Oh, let the consolatory Easter-sermon, “*Be not affrighted*, the Lord is risen!” be said by all means to you, too! For to you, too, yes, to you it is addressed, though you should have denied your Lord and Savior in words and deeds oftener and worse than Peter. “*Be not affrighted*.” Let this Easter salutation, full of sweetest celestial bliss penetrate your heavy hearts. God asks as your answer to His greeting, that you believe it, and when you believe it, that you also tell others of this belief, and if you thus believe and profess, that you continue daily to seek the risen Lord in His Word. Then you will also daily find Him, and with Him lively comfort against sin, divine power for battle and strive, and heavenly refreshings in your earthly tribulations, and finally a bright light of hope in the night of your death. Here, indeed, you will often yet, in spite of your good faith, tremble and be amazed, but be of good cheer: there is a heavenly Galilee; there you, too, shall behold the risen Lord, according to His promise, face to face and be with Him without sin, without fear, in perfect joy and bliss for ever and ever. For He saith, “Where I am, there shall also My servant be.” Amen.

“The Angel’s Consolatory Easter-Sermon: ‘Be Not Affrighted’” (1868) by C. F. W. Walther is here reprinted from The Lutheran Witness, March 21, 1883, Volume 1, Number 21, pages 161-163. Note: While no translator is expressly indicated, the article ends with the initials of The Lutheran Witness’s editor, C. A. Frank, in brackets. This electronic edition was edited and distributed by:

1580press.com