

Standing at the Cross: A Worship Series for Lent, Holy Week and Easter on Themes from Martin Luther

Easter Sunday: Standing in Victory

Sermon

It's probably not surprising to you to learn that the world's largest high definition digital billboard now exists right in the middle of New York City's Times Square. This billboard is unlike any you've ever seen.

It spans an entire city block and is visible from any vantage point in Times Square. The billboard can be clearly seen whether it's broad daylight or two o'clock in the morning because of the countless little lights built right into it. Advertisers are promised that more than two million people will see the sign's messages every single week.

Times Square is sometimes called "The Crossroads of the World." About 460,000 people visit that tourist mecca every day and more than 500,000 vehicles pass through every week. If you want to send a message to a significant portion of the world, this may quite possibly be one of the best ways to do so. You can send your message day and night, night and day, every day of the year, with people from all over America and all over the world viewing your most important message, whatever it may be.

In his sermon for Easter Eve of 1532, Martin Luther said: "The words, Christ is risen from the dead, we should blazon and inscribe with letters so large that just one letter would be as large as a steeple, yes, as heaven and earth, so that we would see and hear, know and think of, nothing but this article."

Luther probably never imagined a high definition digital billboard in Times Square, but he most certainly had a very similar grandiose idea nearly 500 years ago. Use whatever means necessary, he said, to shout to the world that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead.

Today we celebrate the fact that Eden, the paradise of God, has been recreated and made new again. Adam and Eve brought sin into the world with their web of disobedience and deceit. With sin came our most cruel enemy: death. With death came the destruction of everything that was perfect and good. Eden was destroyed and life would now come to an end for every living thing.

Our own personal paradise has also been destroyed by our own personal web of disobedience and deceit. Death has entered our lives, our families and our community. Every human being lives in fear of death. No human being can escape it. It is the enemy we must all face.

Thanks to Adam and Eve paradise was lost. But blame rests squarely on us, as well. We can't escape the words: "I have sinned by my fault, by my own fault, by my own most grievous fault." Yes, death came into the world with the first sin, but we also put nails in our own coffin. The message we advertise with our own lives is far too often sin, selfishness and death.

We may sometimes feel, and even act like the walking dead. But two bright angels have a proclamation for us today: “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.” The crucifixion of Christ has more than paid the price for our selfish sin. The resurrection of Christ guarantees our own resurrection.

All those who have been baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus have put on Christ. We have been given the gift of grace received through faith. We have certain hope that because of Christ’s resurrection we too shall rise from the dead.

The prophet Hosea predicted long ago what has now come to pass: “After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.”

That is the guarantee for our future. Eternal death is destroyed. We will be raised from physical death. Paradise eternal is now restored for us, ready and waiting for our own entry at some point in time.

In the meantime, Almighty God has created his own high definition light-up billboard to proclaim to the world, “Christ is risen from the dead!” It’s not confined just to Times Square. It doesn’t only reach two million people per week. It is on display anywhere and everywhere God’s people go. It is as high and as wide and as deep as the world. It spans from east to west and from north to south.

You are the light of Christ. You are his banner and billboard. All of God’s people, wherever they live, are little Christs shining forth with the light of his resurrection. Almighty God sends his message day and night, night and day, every day of the year, through his people who are alive, filled with grace, rejoicing and sharing the Good News.

One little life is enough to shine eternal light for someone who lives in hopeless darkness. Just imagine the impact when all God’s people come together to light up this dark world. It’s far brighter than the brightest billboard. It is a light that is never snuffed. This light cannot be quenched, even by death.

Most importantly today, this light is for you. “Christ is risen from the dead.” He is “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” The death that came through sin has no mastery over you. Christ’s resurrection reigns supreme.

He *is* the Light of the World. He now lives *his* life and shines *his* light through *you*. Today, and always, we “see and hear, know and think of, nothing but this article.” “Christ is risen from the dead!” Hallelujah! Amen!

Pastor Keith