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COVID-19 Newsletter—April 6, 2020

St. John—St. James Evangelical Lutheran Church
Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Darin Aden, Pastor

Church Office: 920-754-4568 daden@stjohnstjames.com

Rick Zimmerman, Principal

School Office: 920-754-4432 rzimmerman@stjohnstjames.com



Church/School Temporary Office Hours:

Monday—8:00 am to 12:00 pm
Tuesday—8:00 am to 12:00 pm
Wednesday—8:00 am to 12:00 pm
Thursday—8:00 am to 12:00 pm
Friday—8:00 am to 12:00 pm



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April 6, 2020

Dear Child of God,

I pray the Lord has been keeping you safe as we strive to be “Safer at Home.” During these strange times I am reminded of Paul’s inspired words to the Romans: ***I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith.*** (Romans 1:11,12) While we wait for the opportunity to meet together and mutually encourage each other in person, your leaders want to send regular correspondence to help us stay connected, updated, and spiritually fed.

UPDATES:

Many of you have found ways to support our ministry with your offerings. On behalf of your fellow members: Thank you! I ask you all to continue to pray about our church’s ability to meet our financial obligations. If you are able to support your church’s work at this time, please consider making your offerings through direct deposit or through the online bill paying methods which many of you are accustomed to using. Contact the office, if you have questions about those options. Our offering envelopes allow you to mail your offering envelopes if you so choose. You may also drop off your offering envelopes in person using the School entrance (Door “A”) during office hours (8am to noon). We are offering an additional option of Mondays 4-6pm to buy SCRIP and drop off offerings. There is a small wooden locked box with a slot to deposit your offerings located in front of the inner doors. Offerings are removed at the end of office hours each day.

Needed each week	General Fund: \$8,808	<u>Received 3/22/20: \$7,259*</u>
	Building Fund: \$2,312	<u>Received 3/22/20: \$1,825</u>

<u>Received 3/29/20: \$6,625*</u>
<u>Received 3/29/20: \$395</u>

*These offerings are for the entire week and include Missions & MLHS, which are included in the weekly needed for the General Fund

Your leaders have been meeting virtually. We are continuing to assess our needs and striving to accommodate the needs of our people. Please contact us with concerns, needs, and ideas. We want to stay connected and serve as many as we can.

Your Worship Committee specifically asked me to share our concern about potential future funerals. As many of you are aware, we are not able to gather more than 10 people at a time. If a funeral for a loved one is required, it will undoubtedly be different than we would like. I will do my best to serve families during such a time of loss. A larger memorial service in the future, may be an option. We know of no current needs—the Committee after discussing it, just wanted to prepare people and also ask you to pray for those who may be going through loss now or in the near future.



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OPPORTUNITIES FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH:

WORSHIP opportunities:

- **Facebook:** We are posting links to abbreviated weekly Sunday worship services on the SJSJ Facebook page. We're also posting mid-week worship, devotions, and Passion History readings videos almost daily. The SJSJ Facebook page can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/St-John-St-James-Lutheran-School-133904743312183/>
- **YouTube:** We started a YouTube Channel for St. John-St. James to post videos. Search for the SJSJ Channel on or it can be found at address below (spaces are actually underscored, not spaces) https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCbFx_HMWlwhQq_lvSrFLwTA/
- **DVDs:** We are producing DVDs of the Sunday worship services each week. They are available in the school entryway (Door A). Please stop by to take one or contact us for more information.
- **Cable Television:** Trinity, Brillion broadcasts their services on local Cable channel 4 (Reedsville) on Tuesday evenings at 6:30pm, and channel 978 (Brillion) on Monday evenings at 6:30pm.

(This is a change from what we originally shared.)

- **Analog Television:** "Time of Grace" is produced by a WELS group and is televised on WGBA (NBC26) Saturday night, 12:00 am and Sunday morning, 6:30 am. Visit <http://timeofgrace.org> for details and for other daily devotion options. *They have added a daily evening devotion.*
- **Holy Communion:** There has been a lot of discussion and brainstorming, but for the time being, we are still choosing to not offer Lord's Supper. We will continue to evaluate this issue. We appreciate your desire to enjoy the blessings of Holy Communion, but we take comfort that in the meantime the Lord promises to strengthen our faith through his Holy Word.
- **FM Radio:** St. John's & Trinity, Kaukauna cooperate to broadcast sermons on 91.9 FM each Sunday morning at 7:30 am. St. Paul's, Appleton also broadcasts sermons on 1280 AM each Sunday morning at 8:00 am. (They typically offer a service from 1-3pm on Good Friday. I don't know their plans.)

DEVOTIONAL/GROWTH opportunities:

- **Bible Study:** Our Growing in God's Word Bible study has been meeting through Google Meet. A number of new students of joined the class. We'd love to have more. Please contact me or the office, if you'd like to attend. I need to send you a direct invitation to the class. Our Tuesday night sessions are from 6:30 to 7:30 pm.
- **WELS:** Our Synod produces some wonderful devotional materials. Many of them are available for subscription without cost to your email address. Visit <http://wels.net> for resources, encouragement, and synod updates. (They also have a WELS app for smartphones.) We also have a publishing house that produces theologically sound materials. If you are looking for additional devotional or study materials, visit <http://nph.net> or call 800-662-6022 for prices and ordering.
- **MLHS Chapel:** Lutheran High will be livestreaming their chapel services Monday through Friday at 10:03 am. Everyone is welcome to be fed by God's Word. Visit <http://mlhslanders.org> and click on "Lancer Vision."



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- **Written Sermons:** I've enclosed a couple of written sermons for Holy Week. We pray these sermons will help those not able to worship with us using DVDs or online resources remain connected to our church family and more importantly to our Lord. Enclosed are sermons for Good Friday and Easter. Everyone is encouraged to read them—they are different than the worship that will be posted online or recorded on DVD.

Your pastor is praying for you and wants to be able to serve you. If you have special spiritual needs during this time, please contact me. I'm happy to discuss your needs and provide care as needed. The office phone numbers are listed above. My cell phone number is 920-277-0101.

Blessings,

Pastor Darin Aden

Pastor Darin D. Aden daden@stjohnstjames.com

Announcements

FORWARD IN CHRIST MAGAZINE—If you would like a 1-year subscription to *Forward In Christ* magazine please give the office a call at 920-242-8086/754-4432. The subscription is \$13.44/year please make checks out to SJSJ (219 Manitowoc St., Reedsville, WI 54230) and submit to the office by April 15th.

EASTER BREAKFAST— Our annual Easter Breakfast has been cancelled due to the COVID-19 Pandemic “Safer At Home” act that has been put into place by Wisconsin Governor Evers.

SYMPATHIES—Our most sincere sympathies the family of Debra Schuh, daughter of Luellis Meyer and sister of DeLaine Reis who has passed away on March 18, 2020 and to the family of Judy Olm, Mother of Chad Olm who passed away on March 25, 2020. My God hold you in his loving arms!

PRAYERS NEEDED—Pastor Mark Zarling, the President of Martin Luther College, New Ulm, MN has tested positive for the Coronavirus. He was in the hospital with shortness of breath and was released after a short stay. Everyone at the college who were in contact with him are quarantined. None of them have shown any symptoms. Please keep Pastor Zarling and the MLC family in your prayers.

EASTER LILIES— Easter Lilies have been cancelled because of no Easter Worship Service on Easter Sunday April 12th. If we were not able to contact you, please call the office at 920-242-8086 or 920-754-4432 to let us know how we can refund you.

Good Friday
The Greatest Battle Ever Fought
Sermon Text: Matthew 27:45-50

From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”). When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “He’s calling Elijah.” Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. The rest said, “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him.” And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

Suddenly, right at noon, when the sun is brightest, it turned dark. It was so dark that there was no sunlight at all, nor moon or stars. Just darkness. Everything came to a stop. And it was no eclipse. Historians tell us that as far away as Egypt, everyone was experiencing the same mysterious and frightening darkness.

The darkness came because of a crucifixion—an ugly way to put people to death. It could sometimes take a couple days to die, depending upon how badly the person had been whipped. How hot and how long it must have been. The executed criminal’s diaphragm worked slower and slower until he was asphyxiated as his breaths became shallower and shallower.

Jesus was with two others on their crosses outside of Jerusalem. Thousands and thousands of people had followed him, listening intently to him and singing his praises. Less than a week before, a crowd had called him Savior. A few hours before this moment, he had acknowledged that he was the King of the kingdom of truth. He was God’s special soldier. But now the warrior was dying.

This was the final battle. The big one. He had come into this world and had worked every day of his life to prepare for this. Your future, my future, and the future of everyone who has ever lived was hanging on the outcome of this battle:

The Greatest Battle Ever Fought

Websites that list “the greatest battles of all time” say their criteria is usually based on the influence of a battle on history. Battles, cultures, countries, leaders, and forms of government all have influence on history. But they come and go.

Except for Jesus and this battle. The life of Jesus is the most significant single life in all of history. And what happened on the cross at his death changed the entire world and everyone who has ever lived.

1. His enemy Satan attacked Jesus relentlessly.

“From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*’ (which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’)”

The physical agony that Jesus suffered was horrendous. He had already been distressed the night before in Gethsemane. There was no sleep at all that night because of the trials. Then came the special punishment: the crown of thorns, the constant mocking, the pulling out of his beard, the blows to his face, the humiliation of having his clothing stripped off, the cruel scourging that ripped out skin and flesh down to the bone with each lash. Weakened, he was forced to carry that heavy crossbeam until he collapsed. Only after all that did they lay him down on the cross and drive long nails through his wrists and feet and hoist the cross up and into its hole as the soldiers and the Jewish leaders mocked him. How can anyone do such things to another human being? That’s my Savior they are torturing! It’s hard to read that account.

But Jesus withstands that pain and agony without complaint! As a matter of fact, you hear him speak some amazing words on the cross: First, he offered a prayer asking the Father to forgive all those who crucified and mocked him. Then he answered the desperate prayer of the thief who believed in him with a tremendous gospel promise of heaven that very day. And calmly and with a tender concern for his mother, he told John to care for her.

But there was darkness. And we begin to realize that all his physical suffering was perhaps like an insect sting compared to the spiritual suffering that is happening on the cross. The darkness shows us how much God hates sin, that terrible thing that always separates us from him. The darkness is “both God’s reaction to the judicial murder of his Son, and God’s dreadful judgment upon sin as suffered by his Son.”

We may be grateful, in a way, for the darkness. It certainly must have shut up the mockers. But it also covered up what no eyes should ever have to see as Jesus was on that cross, alone, against all the forces of hell. Satan hates Jesus. And this is the moment when he now saw the Son of Man and Son of God at his weakest—where he might be vulnerable. Satan will do everything to force Jesus to give up his life’s work of paying for your guilt and mine and for atoning for the whole world’s sins.

The devil’s lying reaches a fever pitch. Perhaps he told Jesus, ”You won’t make any difference, Son of God. You are not big enough to cover the whole world’s guilt and sin, Jesus. The whole history of humanity is on my side, Christ. Why care about these people? They turned on you. Even Judas and Peter did it. Thousands will turn on you later.”

The internal pain and pressure mount higher and higher. So much darkness! What have I done to cause this? What have you done that Jesus should suffer so? The weight of the sins of billions upon billions of people are pressing down—all the massacres in the world, all the abortions, all the divorces, all the horrible things you and I have ever said, thought, and done.

And Jesus is fighting this powerful evil angel in this great darkness, alone, pure, holy, and faithful. Still loving us. Still holding his ground. Even a child can understand that this is why Jesus is both God and man! Man to be our substitute; God to pay for all the sins of humanity.

But now the worst part: The Father’s white-hot anger is burning against him. Think of the power he had—the Creator of the universe who crushed that world with a gigantic flood, who smashed Sodom and Gomorrah, who made the mountain tremble and shake for Moses—that’s who is directing his full anger and fury against Jesus.

You can hear it in Jesus’ voice as his tone changes. An awful and loud cry came from those tortured lungs. Perhaps it’s a scream: **“About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’ (which means ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’)”**

We know our triune God is one eternal God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So I can’t get my head around the fact that the Son is now forsaken. The Father, source of all true love in this world, turns his back on the Son whom he had so clearly declared at his baptism and on the transfiguration mountain, “My beloved.”

The Father suspends his relationship with his Son so that the warrior Son could pay for this entire world’s sins. It must have torn at the Father’s heart. His wrath is focused on the evil that Jesus bore because he so hates the malignant tumor of sin that is causing the human race to rot.

At the beginning of this suffering, Jesus called him “Father.” You can see the intimacy, the closeness. Now it is “My God, my God” as he loudly asks that big why question. Notice how formal that is?

You can see that while the relationship is broken, his faith is still strong, even as he is left alone. This is the moment of sheer horror for our warrior. It’s the worst moment of his life, and his lonely suffering has reached its peak on that cross. It is here that the battle is either going to be won or lost as Jesus suffers for us.

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah explains what is happening: **“Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted” (Isaiah 53:4).**

All this is because of us. Jesus remained perfect and holy in himself this entire time. Yet our sin was charged to him and he was willingly paying for it. No matter how old you are, by now you have noticed something about yourself, as have I. We are not always aware of how much we sin. But we are aware that something is broken inside us. Often we think that we will just work harder to break that anger habit, that laziness habit, that lust habit, that greed habit, that overeating habit, and all the other sins we find ourselves falling back on. News flash: Our problem is bigger. We cannot work hard enough. We need a bigger warrior

who can purchase forgiveness for us all! This is God's grace in all its sweat and blood!

2. When the dust had settled, came the victory cry

Perhaps the darkness began to retreat. The mockers start in again, thinking Jesus' cry was begging Elijah to come back: **"When some of those standing there heard this, they said, 'He's calling Elijah.' Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. The rest said, 'Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him'" (Matthew 27:47-49).**

But the end is near. They wait. But not long. Things happen very quickly. Jesus was thirsty. **"When he had received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished'" (John 19:30). "And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit" (Matthew 27:50).**

Mark tells us that the temple curtain was "torn in two from top to bottom" (Mark 15:38). Someone has said that was God's way of saying "Amen" to Jesus' words "It is finished." That means that there is no more need for sacrificing. No more sheep, goats, or bulls need to be killed. There was no more need for priests or high priests. All the restrictions that were in place to keep God's chosen people separate were all removed. Every prophecy in the Old Testament about the coming Savior has been fully kept. God has opened up access to himself for all people, nations, languages, cultures, and generations through the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. He actually transferred the righteousness of Jesus to us!

Notice how we can tell that the sacrifice of Jesus is completed: He says, "Father" again! God's anger has been spent. The terrible separation between Father and Son no longer exists. That loud cry, "It is finished," says everything. In this greatest battle of all time, the work of atoning for humanity is over! Jesus has smashed Satan's head, as predicted in Eden. It's a clear knockout blow. The devil is mortally wounded, still walking around, but he can no longer win. Satan had thought he had heaven's gates locked down tightly. Jesus took off the locks and has locked Satan down with a restricting chain!

Our home in heaven is prepaid! There is nothing more you or I, or even God, has to do to pay for our guilt and sin! We are forgiven!

His work is done. He's exhausted, but everything is just as it should be. So it's time for him to leave. The soldiers, the mockers, hell, and Satan could not kill him. Now, of his own free will, he gives his soul into his Father's loving hands. Our holy Jesus, who remained unspotted and unblemished as he experienced our hell, now offers his pure and perfect life as the final, once-and-for-all sacrifice that had been promised ever since Eden's garden!

It is finished! Amen.

Endnotes

[1] The People's Bible: Mark, p. 226.

[2] In the book of Revelation (12:7-12), John tells us that as the battle rages at the cross, there was another battle, unseen, going on in the sky between the angels of heaven and the demons. The demons lost.

Easter Sunday
Victory!
Sermon Text: Revelation 19:11-16

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will rule them with an iron scepter.” He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: king of kings and lord of lords.

This is a day of victory and a celebration of our great champion, Jesus, who is pictured in our text. But first let us consider another picture. Artist Albert Ryder created a memorable painting entitled “The Race Track.” It hangs in Cleveland’s Museum of Art today. Its subtitle reads, “Death on a Pale Horse.” The horseman is alone on the track and is wielding a huge scythe. On the ground alongside the track is a big snake. Perhaps the first thing you notice as you look at the picture is that the rider is going clockwise—the wrong way.

The rider is no doubt going in the “wrong” direction so he can pick off everyone else as they race toward the finish. We know that he will get every one. That pale rider, Death, is coming after me. He’s got your friends and family in his sights. He’s going to catch you. And he always wins. Or so it would seem, and so it appears to us all here in this world.

But now let’s go back to the picture from Revelation. The rider on a white horse is King of kings and Lord of lords. We might be a bit afraid of him because he seems threatening with blazing fire and a sharp sword and because he “treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.” But we notice his power. He is able to overcome all. He is victorious. He seems to be the final image of the warrior we have been thinking about all Lent. Today on this Easter we celebrate our Lord’s victory over Satan and over death. It is a day to celebrate.

Victory!

Our Savior is the greatest hero and warrior ever. But we last left him on Good Friday hanging on a cross. He had just declared, “It is finished,” and then voluntarily given up his life. His body went limp. His heart stopped. Some might wonder, “How can he be victorious if he is dead?”

1. Our hero is not dead, but alive, having defeated death.

Look again: “**I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war.**” One thing we notice in this revelation given to St. John is that this rider is not a statue. He’s not carved in marble or made of bronze. He is alive and powerful, and he is actively at war—with the host of heaven following him.

We know who this is: Jesus! What a grand picture of him! He is no longer a captive humiliated by soldiers. He is no longer beaten and whipped. His head is not bowed. His body is not in a grave. As St. Paul wrote—you can almost see him using all capital letters—“**Christ has indeed been raised from the dead**” (**1 Corinthians 15:20**).

That’s what today, this Easter day, is all about! Victory! Death has actually been conquered! Jesus had certainly died. As a matter of fact, after he was already dead, the professional killers stabbed him in the heart to make sure he was dead. His body was then placed in a grave and sealed tight. The blood that Jesus shed cleanses us from sin, not just ours but the sins of all the world. That victory was clear when Jesus said, “It is finished”!

¹ If you are using a screen, you may wish to put the painting up: <http://www.clevelandart.org/art/1928.8>

Yet one more foe must be vanquished: Death. “**The last enemy to be destroyed is death**” (**1 Corinthians 15:26**). Jesus’ empty tomb makes it clear that he is more powerful than death. He claims victory over that last enemy.

Jesus met death up close. He let death grab hold of him, just as he permitted the soldiers to take him away in the garden. He volunteered to die. Every lamb that had been sacrificed on Jewish altars for the previous 1,400 years had foreshadowed, promised, and predicted the death of the Lamb of God. The God-man, Jesus, paid the penalty as the perfect, law-keeping human and as the only one who has ever lived who was big enough, because he is also true God, to make the perfect sacrifice to cover the sin and guilt of the entire world. But Jesus did something no one else has ever done. He killed death! He arose. He is stronger than the grave! Jesus was alive! Jesus is alive! The mighty rider on the white horse is a victorious rider.

There is no doubt. The Bible lists over a dozen different appearances of the risen Jesus, including one time when there were five hundred people present. Most of the gospel accounts, including St. Paul’s account of the resurrection, were written during the lifetime of thousands of people who were alive at the time of the first Easter. If it were not true, they would have said so and written so. Then Christianity would have become just another fairy tale. If it had not happened, you would have expected books written by the Jewish leaders and the Romans that would have refuted the gospel accounts. But so many knew either from personal experience or from what they heard directly from people who had experienced it firsthand. Jesus actually rose miraculously from the grave.

How important that is to all of us. You know death is coming for you too, don’t you? We try our best to push it away. We spend more than a trillion dollars a year in the United States alone to try to treat cancers, heart disease, and some of the more common threats to life. We just can’t stop it. Medically, death arrives when the heart stops and the brain waves (including the brain stem) irreversibly cease. There is no cure but one!

The empty tomb of Jesus proves his words about death are true: “**I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die**” (**John 11:25**). That’s you, and that’s me. We will rise because the one who has conquered death said so. We must close our eyes in death, just as Jesus did, and fall asleep only to rise glorious. We must put off the mortal, perishable bodies and rise with immortal and imperishable bodies as St. Paul tells us: “**In a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality**” (**1 Corinthians 15:52,53**).

The apostle’s words bring us back to our victorious Lord riding the white horse. He has the power to do as he promised.

2. Our living hero has all authority on the day of judgment.

“**His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. ‘He will rule them with an iron scepter.’ He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: king of kings and lord of lords.”**

If you ever had the idea that Jesus was too weak or too soft or too kind to take on tough enemies, realize that this is the last picture of Jesus that we have in the Bible. There are references to the great white throne and Jesus on that throne amidst the beautiful, final picture of heaven, but this is the image God wants on our brain. Why?

The awesome power of Jesus is portrayed with the sharp sword and the iron scepter, as he carries out the fury of the Father. Notice his robe is “dipped in blood.” When you heard that, you probably thought immediately that it was a reference to his own blood, shed on the cross. But the reference to “tread[ing] the winepress” of God’s fury helps us to understand that this is a very graphic picture of the battle with his enemies.

² <https://www.msn.com/en-us/money/healthcare/11-costliest-diseases-in-the-us/ss-BBnOzYV#>

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah had already been inspired to write about Jesus:

“Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress?” (Isaiah 63:2). The one robed in splendor proclaimed, **“I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing” (Isaiah 63:3).**

Why this anger and judgment? Jesus shed his innocent blood to wash away the sins of the world and rose again to demonstrate his power over death. These victories he freely gives to all humanity. He reconciled the world to himself (2 Corinthians 5:19). He promised that all who believe in God’s gift of his own Son would not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16). What of those who refused his gracious gifts? Consider what Jesus taught in the parable of the wedding banquet. The one who refused to wear the wedding garment freely given by the King was thrown out. He was bound hand and foot and thrown into **“darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 22:13).**

Sure and certain judgment will come to Satan and all the rebellious host of hell. They have worked against the Lord of lords and King of kings. They were the first who rebelled against him. But those who refused his gifts and have mocked our Savior and his people will also be judged. As the psalmist wrote long ago, those who **“band together against the Lord and against his anointed” (Psalm 2:2)** will be judged by the one pictured here as riding the white horse. He will **“break them with a rod of iron”** and **“dash them to pieces like pottery” (Psalm 2:9).**

Here in this imagery, we have Easter and judgment day holding hands . . . with only an instant between them.

Yet we know that . . .

3. Those with the rider are safe forever. Alleluia!

On earth there are those who refuse to honor him. They will be judged. We are also here, but you and I are believers, heirs of heaven, children of God by his grace. We will rise from death and join the hosts of heaven in praise of our gracious Lord. In heaven, every voice—angels and humans together—will join in giving praise to the rider on the white horse who has used his power for us! He has cleansed us with his blood and covered us with his righteousness. To our heavenly Father, we look just like Jesus! See how much he loves us!

At the moment of our death, the fear will be gone. The ugliness will be gone. The guilt and sin from the past are already gone. The hopelessness, the wondering—those last minutes before our souls leave this body will change from thoughts focused on this life to an inexpressible joy. The splendid and beautiful land of heaven will explode into view! Our souls will come into the welcome presence of this victorious warrior who is Lord of lords and King of kings. When he comes again in glory on the clouds of heaven, he will raise us from our graves. We will have perfect, eternal bodies. Imagine that! There will be love and peace and joy forevermore.

Here’s the picture God gives us at the end of the Bible: “They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Revelation 21:3,4).

The Bible says we will be kings and queens who will serve joyfully under the King of kings and Lord of lords, the great rider on the white horse. Can’t you just see it? Isn’t Easter grand? It’s the final victory.

Alleluia! Amen.

Endnotes

³Handel’s “Hallelujah Chorus” ends with praise to this Lord of lords and King of kings. As an alternative conclusion to this sermon, the preacher may wish to include a reference to it or even a recording: “Let us stand and listen to Handel’s praise of our Lord of lords and King of kings.”