

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
April 24, 2011 – Easter Day**

1 Corinthians 15:51-57

Hymn 143: “He’s Risen, He’s Risen!”

1. *Scriptural truths of our text*
2. *The author, C.F.W. Walther*
3. *The hymn verses*

Hymns: 157–265 – 143 – 152 –
141 – First Song of Isaiah

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

1 Corinthians 15:51-57 –

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—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. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true:

*“Death has been swallowed up in victory.”
“Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?”*

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

March Madness is over! March Madness is the media catch-phrase for the NCAA basketball tournament every spring. It ended early this month when the University of Connecticut emerged from the madness as the champion. Even though the tournament is over, one of its lessons finds itself resurrected today on this Easter morning.

What I mean is this: Those of you who watched some of the 67 teams play down to a final champion may have seen a phenomena that several coaches came to dread. They saw their team working very well together. Everything was clicking. Defensive stops were regular. Perimeter

shots were all falling. They were fighting hard and built up a lead, a 10, 15, even a 20-point lead. But then... the game moved deep into toward its final stages. The momentum slowly switched. Suddenly, a couple shots didn't quite fall. A silly turnover led to a layup by the other team. A key player got their fourth foul.

The team's easy confidence seemed to evaporate. Before they knew it, they were playing just to hold onto the lead, any lead, before the final buzzer. And if you watched a few games, you know what happened in some of them. Some teams, after enjoying a large lead, lost the game in a shocking way. They had it won, but the turnaround got them in the end. Their coach was left to try and answer the media's questions about how victory inconceivably slipped out of their grasp.

Such was the fate of another “coach” on this day, not a coach of any sports team but the leader of the forces of darkness and evil – Satan himself. Today we recount this turnaround.

During the Sundays of Lent, we focused on Scripture texts and verses of many of the great Lenten hymns we've sung for years. To finish that sermon series off, today on Easter morning we're going to look at a well-known Easter hymn that sums up the truths of this day excellently. **Today we look at the hymn “He’s Risen, He’s Risen” by C.F.W. Walther.** Let's first look at the Scripture verses on which the hymn is based. Then we'll look at C.F.W. Walther's life and context in which he wrote the hymn. And finally we'll look at the hymn verses themselves and see how he summed up our Easter victory in them.

1 – The hymn is based on 1 Corinthians 15:57. I'd like to back up and read a few verses before that one verse: *“Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—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. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true:*

'Death has been swallowed up in victory.'
'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

An ominous situation existed before these Scripture verses. In fact, we must backtrack centuries before them to see just how bad the situation was:

- A sad victory was won by the devil when he ruined God's perfect creation by tempting Adam and Eve into the first sin and ushering utter sadness and sorrow into our world.
- Another victory was won when mankind became so corrupt and vile that God regretted he made them and was forced to bring about a worldwide flood to start over.
- Victory after victory was won by Satan as all throughout the Old Testament people turned to idolatry and worshiped false gods, including God's own people he chose to be the ancestors of the Christ, the nation of Israel.

Then the showdown came. The Messiah, the MVP, checked in. A showdown was held in the wilderness after Christ fasted 40 days and the devil tempted him. A victory was won by Jesus, and the devil left him, as Scripture says, until another opportune time. Victory after victory was won by Jesus as he lived a perfect life and gathered his disciples during his earthly ministry. The tide turned. But then came the events in history that we have recounted in the past seven weeks. Jesus' popularity shrunk fast. Jesus had been arrested and condemned by the evil religious leaders of the people. He had been condemned by the Roman governor. He was sentenced to execution. Through these puppets, Satan was able to put the nails through Jesus' hands. Kill the God-man. Kill the Judge. Secure the victory. And take as your own all these human beings that were created originally to be God's good and perfect people.

And then comes... Easter! Out of the jaws of defeat, victory is won and proclaimed by the Savior. The verses we read from 1 Corinthians 15 say it so well: *"Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."*

Death has been defeated. How important that is for us! Think about the power that death held over us (This is something people don't like to think about much!). Think about the odds of dying. I found a website that listed the odds of certain things happening to a person:

- Odds that you're audited by IRS – 1 / 175
- Odds that you're struck by lightning – 1 / 576,000
- Odds of being injured in chain saw accident – 1 / 4464
- Odds of being a victim of serious crime during lifetime – 1 / 20
- Odds diagnosed with cancer – 1 / 3

What are the odds that you will die, if this world goes on for another 150 years? The odds are: 1 / 1 (unless you consider yourself an "Enoch type"). **Death has a 1 / 1 ratio over sinners.**

This causes much fear. People of all cultures fear death and avoid talking about death. People don't like to say the word "death." We substitute words for it, such as the "dearly departed," and saying that a person "passed." I found out that in China the word for "death" sounds like the number "four." Therefore, no hospitals have fourth floors. Many apartment buildings skip the fourth floors, as well as the fourteenth and twenty-fourth!

In the face of all this, what has Christ done? He has changed it all! First, we hear the picture of death being swallowed up. Imagine a person trying to fight an avalanche in the mountains. Imagine him getting out a knife and charging the avalanche. Ridiculous! He will be swallowed up and swept away. This is what the

resurrection of Christ has done to our enemy,
Death.

The other picture in 1 Corinthians 15 is that Death has no more sting. The sting of death also causes much fear, just as the sting of an insect causes fear. If I told you there was a scorpion somewhere in this room, I'd imagine you wouldn't stay long. It's not a big creature and chances are you wouldn't run across it, but you probably would stick around to see. We fear stings. But death's sting is gone! It makes all the difference if a scorpion is in the room but cannot bite or sting you.

This causes Paul to almost "taunt" Death: "*Where is your victory?*" For the tide has turned and our risen Savior has won over the forces of evil! Will this mean something when you must attend the funeral of a loved one who has died in Christ? Certainly there will be sadness and shock, just as Christ had at Lazarus' tomb. **But deep down there will be comfort because of Easter Day! Death has no lasting power over us, for death is but the gate to heaven when we die.**

This also has eternal implications for us, for Paul also wrote: "*Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—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.*" Our bodies will be changed on the Last Day. The dead will rise and believers will have glorious bodies like Christ's. Easter will be replayed on Judgment Day, as believers experience this! Our bodies will no longer be subject to decay, but will live like Christ's body forever in heaven. What glories we have to look forward to!

2 — On Easter Day in 1860 C.F.W. Walther took pen in hand and tried to put these truths into poetry and song, composing both the verses and melody of hymn 143, "He's Risen, He's Risen." If you've never read about the life or writings of C.F.W. Walther, it's worth your time to explore his life and ministry sometime.

Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther was born in Germany in 1811. His father was a Lutheran pastor, as was his grandfather and great-grandfather. But as he was educated and entered college, he had many doubts about spiritual things and his faith. During this time of doubt he suffered a lung ailment while in college that almost took his life. It required six months of quiet recuperation at home. While recuperating, he read the Scriptures along with the works of Luther and came to the firm conclusion that Christ was the Savior as promised by God and that the Lutheran faith he was raised in was indeed the truth.

He became a pastor. However, after serving for a short time, the liberalism and rationalism in the German Lutheran Church was distressing to him and many other Lutherans at the time. Therefore, a group of 650 of them decided to move to the New World. In November, 1838, the group sailed for America. They arrived at New Orleans and traveled up the Mississippi River to St. Louis, MO, where they settled.

In Missouri, a scandal soon ensnared their leader, who was excommunicated from the group. The group then elected a new president, none other than C.F.W. Walther, at the age of 28. The group formed an official Lutheran synod, known as the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, who would become partners in fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod for about 100 years.

All in all, C.F.W. Walther served for many years as the president of the synod. He served as pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church in St. Louis, MO, for 46 years. He founded a college in a log building that later became Concordia Lutheran Seminary, which still operates today in training Missouri Synod pastors. He founded two church newspapers. And he wrote many books and papers as a leading author in the synod, all along enjoying a music interest as well.

The hymn "He's Risen, He's Risen" was written in 1860 when he was undergoing health issues due to the massive workload he had imposed on himself. He was 49 years old. He was forced to take a trip back to Germany for treatment and rest. Easter Day fell on a day during his voyage back to Germany. On the boat

he penned the original 11 verses of this hymn in German along with the melody. He gave the hymn the heading, *“On the first Easter Day, April 8th, 1869, on the Ocean.”*

C.F.W. Walther would later return to Missouri, where he would continue to lead the Missouri Synod until 1887 when he died at the age of 76.

3 — Let’s take a look at the five verses of the hymn that are in our hymnal:

Verse 1 begins:

**He's risen, He's risen, Christ Jesus, the Lord;
He opened death's prison, the incarnate Word.
Break forth, hosts of heaven, in jubilant song,
And earth, sea, and mountain the praises prolong.**

This first verse has a unique picture: A prison break! Walther pictures Christ as breaking out of the tomb where he chose to be imprisoned for your and my sin. He is free! All of creation should join in a song of praise because of what he has done, for he has freed us from the prison of death as well. It’s interesting that Scripture often encourages all of God’s created world to praise his Name.

Verse 2:

**The foe was triumphant when on Calvary
The Lord of creation was nailed to the tree.
In Satan's domain did the hosts shout and jeer:
For Jesus was slain, whom the evil ones fear.**

Walther describes a premature celebration. Perhaps you’ve seen a scene where a team feels the game is won when there still is a little time on the clock. Outwardly, it appeared as though Christ was defeated. He had died, after all, and been buried.

Verse 3:

**But short was their triumph: the Savior arose!
And death, hell, and Satan he vanquished,
His foes.
The conquering Lord lifts his banner on high:
He lives, yes, he lives, and will nevermore die.**

We don’t use the word “vanquish” much anymore. Basically, it means to “overpower.” Christ’s price that he paid on the cross was

sufficient for the sin of mankind and overpowered the devil and his forces. Walther also mentions a banner that he lifts. In war in older times, banners were used for messages and identification. The symbol of the victorious Lamb in the Church has a banner over him to display his victory.

Verse 4:

**O, where is your sting, death? We fear you no more!
Christ rose, and now open is fair Eden's door.
For all our transgressions his blood does atone;
Redeemed and forgiven, we now are his own.**

Walther has three pictures of Christ’s victory here:

- The fear of death’s sting is gone
- The door to the Garden of Eden is open again. Eden means “delight,” and it was a perfectly delightful paradise that God had created for Adam and Eve. But you might remember how the angels and the flaming sword guarded the way to the Tree of Life after the first sin. The door is now open to Paradise!
- We are God’s own people, his sons and daughters in his family.

Verse 5 concludes:

**Then sing your hosannas and raise your glad voice;
Proclaim the blest tidings that all may rejoice.
Laud, honor, and praise to the Lamb that was slain;
Who now sits in glory and ever shall reign.**

Walther’s encouragement to praise Christ, the victorious Lamb, extends into eternity. How true it is that we will praise the Lamb of God in heaven as the book of Revelation pictures!

Finally, no matter what miraculous turnaround you have ever seen in March Madness or any athletic contest will not compare to the victory we see today. This is the assurance that our sins are forgiven and that we will live forever with the Lamb of God! All because “He’s Risen! He’s Risen!” Amen.