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A FREE CHURCH IN A FREE COUNTRY.

Address at the Walther Centennial Celebration at the Light Guard Armory
at Detroit, Mich.¹⁾

FELLOW LUTHERANS:—

We are met to celebrate the dawn, a century ago, of a life that has proved eminently useful, chiefly to the American Lutheran Church, but in a larger view to the Church of Christ in all lands. Walther's uncompromising loyalty to the Holy Scriptures, which he accepted as verbally inspired; his clear and thoroughgoing distinction between man's estate by nature and by grace, under the Law and under the Gospel, through faith and through works; his powerful presentation of that article of the Christian religion with which the Church either stands or falls, the justification of a sinner before the tribunal of divine justice by grace through faith; his equally strong emphasis on the necessary sequel to justification, the sanctification of the justified sinner by daily repentance and renewal, and by holiness of life and conduct; his fearless application of the Word of God to the lives of Christians in all sorts of callings, avocations, and pursuits,—all these things surely merit the approbation of the entire Church.

There is, however, one feature that rises mountainlike out of the level plain of Walther's great life-work, and at the same time is so unique that I believe it deserves special consideration during these commemorative exercises. To this feature I shall, with your permission, limit my remarks.

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THE PROOF TEXTS OF THE CATECHISM WITH A PRACTICAL COMMENTARY.

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THE SECOND ARTICLE.

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

Rom. 1, 4: *Jesus Christ, our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead.*

“Spirit of holiness,” *πνεῦμα ἁγιωσύνης*, is a rare expression in the New Testament. Does it here designate the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit? No. “Holy Spirit” would be expressed by *πνεῦμα ἅγιον*. Studiously, as it were, the apostle avoids this latter expression, and uses the designation “spirit of holiness,” to indicate that it is not to be understood of the Holy Spirit.—What, then, does “spirit of holiness” mean? Let us observe the text! “Christ was made of the seed of David *according to the flesh*,” κατὰ σάρκα. “According to the flesh” obviously means: according to His human nature. Christ was a descendant of David, and as such true man. But this same Christ also possessed a higher nature, a divine nature. This is expressed by *κατὰ πνεῦμα*, *according to the spirit*, according to His divine nature. (Cf. 1 Pet. 3, 18.) Since “according to the spirit” is in antithesis to “according to the flesh,” and “according to the flesh” means His *human nature*, “according to the spirit” can designate nothing else than His *divine nature*. This the antithesis demands. *Πνεῦμα* is *nomen essentiae*. John 4, 24; 2 Cor. 3, 17. Jesus Christ is true man and true God, the Son of God.—This divine nature is *πνεῦμα ἁγιωσύνης*, *spirit of holiness*; i. e., it is absolutely holy. And this holy divine nature of the Son of God permeates, fills, as it were, the human nature of the Son of David.

Now, says Paul, this Person, Jesus Christ, who was not only true man, a seed of David, but also true God, was *declared*, marked off, determined, to be such—God, Son of God. How?

“By the resurrection from the dead.” The incontrovertible fact of His resurrection proves His divine Sonship beyond the shadow of a doubt. The studious change of the language should be noted: Christ was *made* of the seed of David, but He was *not* made, but only declared *to be* the Son of God. (See John 1, 1. 14.) — Christ was the Son of God before the foundation of the world, Col. 1, 15. In the state of humiliation He proved Himself to be the Son of God by His many miracles. Nowhere else, however, have we such conclusive evidence of His being what He claimed to be—Son of God—as in His resurrection from the dead.—The emphatic statement: “He was declared to be the *Son of God in power*” = *υἱὸς θεοῦ ἐν δυνάμει*, i. e., the powerful, the almighty, the majestic Son of God, moreover, adds an important thought. In the state of humiliation Christ always was the mighty God, but He did not always appear as such; He did not always use His divine majesty and power, communicated to His human nature by virtue of the personal union; now, however, by and since His resurrection, He is declared to be Son of God *in power*; now, in the state of exaltation, He fully and constantly uses the divine majesty communicated to His human nature also according to this His human nature.

John 2, 19: *Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*

One day the Jews demanded a special sign of Christ as a proof for His Messiahship. “*Destroy this temple,*” said He, meaning *His body*, v. 21, “*and in three days I will raise it up.*” What a stupendous assertion to make! For ages and ages generations had come and gone, but from the grave not a single person had returned. And here stands this man Jesus before the Jews and says: “You will kill me, but I shall return from the grave, and I shall rise by my own power. I am the Conqueror of death.” What happens? He was crucified, dead, and buried, but on the third day, according to His prediction, He rose again. He spoke truly when He

said: I will raise my body up; He spoke truly when He said on another occasion: "I have power to lay it (my life) down, and I have power to take it again," John 10, 18. None but God is the lord over death. Christ conquered death. He rose of *His own power*; Christ is God. —

But there is another truth in this passage pertinent to the matter in hand. The words, John 2, 19, are a prophecy. Christ prophesied His *death*: "Destroy this temple, my body." He foreknew what the Jews would do with His body: they would "destroy it" — kill Him; and He plainly tells them so. He prophesied concerning His *resurrection*: "In three days I will raise it up." Both prophecies came true. Christ is a true prophet; His doctrine is the truth. — The resurrection of Christ provides us with a solid foundation for our faith in the divinity of Christ, and gives us absolute assurance of the reliability of His doctrine.

1 Cor. 15, 17: *If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.*

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the corner-stone of our Christian faith. Disprove it, and the Christian religion collapses. Sad, beyond expression sad, were our lot if Christ were not risen. St. Paul draws this gloomy picture: 1. "If Christ be not raised, *vain is your faith.*" *Vain*, *ματαια*, is put in an emphatic position. *ματαια* = vain, fruitless, hence without power and effect, futile. "Vain is your faith;" your faith has no ground on which to stand, no truth on which to rely. 2. "*Ye are yet in your sins.*" If Christ is not risen, reconciliation with God is not effected, His wrath abideth on you, you have no forgiveness of sin, you are not redeemed. 3. "*Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.*" These deceased Christians died in the faith of Christ as their Savior; they believed their death to be but a sleep after which there would be a joyful awakening — but lo! if Christ be not raised, they were

deluded—they died without expiation of their sins and are accordingly lost, damned. Aye, indeed, “if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But,” the apostle proceeds, “now is Christ risen from the dead.” Hence it follows: 1. that our faith is not vain, not groundless, but rests upon a firm foundation; 2. that our sins are atoned for; 3. that when we fall asleep in Christ, we, too, shall rise and live with Him eternally.—Christ’s resurrection is proof positive for the completeness and the sufficiency of our redemption, and it gives us full assurance of the truth of His doctrine.

Rom. 4, 25: *Who (Christ) was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification.*

Christ was our Substitute. This well-known truth of Scriptures is obvious in our text also, if we but observe the pronouns “who—our.” The Just takes the place of the unjust, and the Just, Christ, “was delivered,” was given up, *viz.*, to death, *διὰ τὰ παραπτώματα ἡμῶν*, on account of our trespasses. The Just died for the unjust in order to expiate their trespasses. God delivered Him into death on account of our sins. Rom. 8, 32; Gal. 1, 3. And willingly “Christ gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity,” Tit. 2, 14. On the cross at Calvary our Substitute expired with the words on His lips: “It is finished.” Atonement for our sins was made. But the anxious question remained, “Will God accept this atonement?” A dead Savior can avail us nothing. Where is the proof that God is satisfied with the work of His Son? Triumphantly Christ rises from the grave on the third day. “*He was raised for our justification.*” Here is proof, positive proof, that His death had been accepted as an expiation for our sins. In order to justify us, God raised Christ from the dead. We look to Calvary and we know: “Christ was delivered for our offenses.” We look into the empty grave of Christ and are assured: “He was raised for our justification.” God the Father has accepted the sacrifice of His Son for the reconciliation of the world.

John 14, 19: "*Because I live, ye shall live also.*"

John 11, 25. 26: *I am the Resurrection and the Life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.*

In a little Christian family, in the small village at Bethany, there is deep sorrow. Martha and Mary mourn over the death of their brother Lazarus. Jesus comes that way, and in the course of the conversation He consoles Martha by saying: "Thy brother shall rise again." Martha believes that. She says: "I know he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Then Jesus utters the mighty words of our text. In the fullness of emphasis he says: "*I am*" — *Ἐγώ εἰμι* — "*the Resurrection,*" and hence the whole power to effect it is mine. In me the resurrection is absolutely certain. I am "*the Life.*" I have immortality, imperishable, unchanging life, in myself (John 1, 4), and can impart it to others, so that they need not and cannot die. "*He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.*" Belief in me, faith in me, so intimately unites the believer with me that as certainly as I live the believer shall also live. — John 14, 19: "*Because I live, ye shall live also.*" True, the Christians, too, must die. But in the light of Scripture, what is temporal death for the Christians? A sleep. Says Paul: "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so *them* also *which sleep in Jesus* will God bring with Him," 1 Thess. 4, 14. And Jesus says: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, *he shall never see death,*" John 8, 51. The bitterness of death the Christian will not taste. Death to him is but a sleep after which there is a blissful awakening. Death has been swallowed up of life. Temporal death of Christians is so little to be looked upon as death that Christ says: "*And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.*" Temporal death to the Christians is but an entrance to eternal life. — Thus the resurrection of Christ from the dead makes us absolutely certain of a blessed life beyond the grave.

CHRIST'S ASCENSION.

Ps. 68, 18: *Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captivity captive; Thou hast received gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious also.*

Forty days after His resurrection, Christ ascended into heaven visibly, according to His human nature, as narrated in the Gospels and the Acts. In the night when He was betrayed, He said to His disciples: "In my Father's house are many mansions. . . . I go to prepare a place for you," John 14, 3. Christ ascended into heaven for us, for our benefit. Hence this doctrine, too, is full of strong consolation for His servants. — This His ascension was foretold in the Old Testament. Ps. 68 is a Messianic psalm. Paul quotes it Eph. 4, 8 as speaking of Christ. Christ is the Lord Jehovah extolled in the psalm. After a long and fierce warfare with His enemies, Christ remains the Victor. His and our enemies have been overcome. The work of redemption being completed, He "ascended on high," *i. e.*, into heaven. He despoiled principalities and powers, Col. 2, 15; He "led captivity captive," He "led away captives" (S. A. V.), *i. e.*, Satan and all his hellish cohorts, making a show of them openly in a triumphal procession. Our enemies are vanquished. Not only that. This exalted Christ who ascended into heaven has not only "led away captives," but He also "received gifts for men," or rather, He "received gifts among men," that is to say, the "men" are the gifts, "men" he has received; men, who are now His own, believe in Him and serve Him. He "received gifts among men so that rebellious also dwell with the Lord God." (Stoeckhardt.) The Standard American Version translates thus, the sense remaining essentially the same as the one here given: "Thou hast received gifts among men, yea, among the rebellious also, that Jehovah God might dwell with them." *Rebellious*, too, *i. e.*, men who at one time opposed the Lord, turn to the Lord, lay down their rebel arms, and by His grace live with Him in His kingdom. To such rebellious people whom the Lord draws to Himself belong the heathen, such as

the Ethiopians and the Egyptians, of whom the psalm speaks. (Cf. Stoeckhardt, *Epheserbrief*, p. 190.)

Eph. 4, 10: *He that descended is the same also that ascended far above all heavens, that He might fill all things.*

St. Paul, quoting Ps. 68, 18, goes on to say: "Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?" Then follows our text. "*He that descended,*" the very same, just He, and no one else, He precisely, "*is the same also that ascended.*" His ascent corresponds to His descent. "*He that descended*" — whither did He descend? "Into the lower parts of the earth," says v. 9. This is a fitting description of His *descensio ad inferos*. (Cf. 1 Pet. 3, 19.) As Victor He descended into hell. Having descended into the *utmost depth*, He, after a brief sojourn here on earth, ascended to the *utmost height*; He "*ascended far above all heavens,*" above all created heavens, to sit at the right hand of God the Father, Eph. 1, 20. The purpose of His ascension the apostle expresses thus: "*that He might fill all things.*" After His exaltation and ascension Christ fills "all things" with His efficacious presence, also according to His glorified human nature, and from this omnipresence flows His special gracious presence with His Church, as the apostle shows further on.

John 12, 26: *Where I am, there shall also my servant be.*

Speaking of His approaching death, Jesus had said: "The hour" decreed in the eternal counsel "is come that the Son of Man should be glorified." By His passion and death, through which He must pass, He was to enter into the glory of the Father. Pursuing this thought, He thinks of His own. "*Where I am*" in this my kingdom, "*there shall also my servant be.*" Christ and His servants shall be together always. He has ascended to prepare a place for us.

Springfield, Ill.

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(To be continued.)