

**“Back to You, Where We Belong!”**

**Colossians 3:1-4**

A very blessed, joyous and happy First Day of the Rest of Your Lives! Christ is risen! **He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!** It is the day that all creation sings out its hymns of praise and glory giving its thanks to the One who redeemed us all from death and destruction, and now opens wide the gates of life where nothing ever again will or can destroy God’s plan of life eternal. This is the day the Lord has made and in it we not only rejoice, but cling to the hope that life is holy, that all creation is a gift from God, and that we are indeed the very ones for whom our Lord Jesus would die and rise again. Jesus is risen from the dead, and because he has risen so shall we. Here we are now, celebrating and singing, praying and praising, shining and smiling, laughing and hugging just where we belong. We are indeed back to God where we belong. Christ is risen. **He is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

Speaking of jokes—or maybe I wasn’t. I guess I was thinking about the weather. Probably the latest Easter in most of our lifetimes and it feels more like the earliest one of our lifetimes 3 years ago. The weather just may be a joke, but here’s one I think you will enjoy.

Born a Lutheran

Each Friday night after work, Ole would fire up his outdoor grill on the shore of Chub Lake and cook a venison steak. But, all of Ole’s neighbors were Catholic... And since it was Lent, they were forbidden from eating meat on Friday.

The delicious aroma from the grilled venison steaks wafted over Castle Rock all the way to Haslewood, and was causing such a problem for the Catholic faithful that they finally talked to their priest.

The Priest came to visit Ole, and suggested that he become a Catholic. After several classes and much study, Ole attended Mass.....and as the priest sprinkled holy water over him, he said, "You were born a Lutheran, and raised a Lutheran, but now you are a Catholic."

Ole’s neighbors were relieved, until Friday night arrived, and the wonderful aroma of grilled venison filled the neighborhood.

The Priest was called immediately by the neighbors and, as he rushed into Ole’s yard, clutching a rosary and prepared to scold him, he stopped and watched in amazement.

There stood Ole, clutching a small bottle of holy water which he carefully sprinkled over the grilling meat and chanted: "You vuz born a deer.....you vuz raised a deer..... but now you is a walleye."

I can safely suggest that the joke probably has not much at all to do with the sermon other than to give us another opportunity to smile and laugh, and rejoice today. Even if we are in the midst of our bluest moments, or having such miserable spring weather, or things just don't seem to be going well or right, we have a reason to have hope today. These things too shall pass because Jesus has risen. Night is gone and the day has come. Despair has turned to hope. Sadness to joy. Tears of mourning to tears of overwhelming gladness. God has looked upon this world with eyes of compassion, and through the death and resurrection of his Son he proclaims this day that life is valuable—everything that he made in those first days of creation has value. The birds singing, the clouds passing by, the stars twinkling, the animals leaping, the sun shining and the moon glowing. God says “yes” to everything that suffered through the downfall from sin, and this day we sing of God's re-creation of life.

We know when it all began to go downhill. Yes it was the serpent who tempted Eve and tricked Adam and everything fell apart. Adam and Eve were ushered out of Paradise and the rest is history. But this day, the grandest of all days, the greatest of all celebrations, the Supreme Day of all, God opens the gates again to say, “Come back to me, where you belong”. And so we are. Here in this house of God, the place of prayer and praise, where we read and hear the best good news ever, where we eat and drink the holy supper with the company of heaven and the company of this congregation, where we were marked forever as a baptized child of God, we are where we belong. God has called us back to him through Jesus. God came to us in the flesh to tell us that this flesh is valuable, as much as our hearts that pump the life through our bodies and the soul and spirit that make us who we are. God loves us everything about us. He forgives us of our sin, destroys what sin does to us, relieves us from the pain of sin and death, redeems us/buys us back to him through the very blood of the Lamb—Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Jesus is risen—his whole being once dead but now alive, and through eyes of love and mercy our whole being is raised as well.

*I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go into the House of the Lord!" Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem.* (Ps 122:1-2) The psalmist declares our mutual praise this day. It is good to be here, and as Peter said to Jesus on the Mount of his Transfiguration, it would be great to stay even longer. This is where we belong—the young and old, the busy and bored, the healthy and wealthy, poor and sick, children and parents, aged and infant. We all belong here, but sadly we are not always here. Where were you Thursday night? Did you stand at the foot of cross realizing what your sin did Friday? Will you be here next week still singing the joyful songs of our resurrection? Where we belong is not always where we are. We still have a tendency to doubt the power of the resurrection. We still don't believe Jesus as much as we think we do. We still find life leading us elsewhere that is not always the worst thing, but often we are led farther away from Jesus rather than closer. Other gods become tempting to follow. We try them out and see if they please our needs and wants. In other words, we all still sin, and so we are caught in a game of tugging and pulling away at our beliefs and so often we go astray. Sin is not gone or has it disappeared because of the resurrection of Jesus. We still are victims to the tricks and treats offered by the old evil Foe. It is we turning our backs to our Lord, going elsewhere for whatever reason.

But it is good to be here. It is supposed to be that way every time we are here. Obviously and naturally our human nature can get in the way, but today we are reminded again that we have been raised from the dead with Christ. We are new people who have been given the power to be new and alive. The Spirit of Christ is breathed into our very souls and the resurrection of Jesus promises us that these bones and flesh shall see new life as well. And in the meantime, God keeps pouring out his love for us, his encouragement, his people to prompt and provoke us for good, his word preached and proclaimed, and in the sacraments we are given heavenly power to sustain us in this earthly life. There is no reason not to have something powerful and good to come our way this day in this place. We have hope that we will be united again with those who have gone before us. We believe that we shall rise from the dead. We believe that there will be more than just Lutherans in heaven. We believe our sin is forgiven and forgotten by

God—thank you, Lord. And we believe that the resurrection instills in us the desire to keep our heads up every day finding then the strength and Spirit to keep us faithful. At the end of each day, God still welcomes us home no matter how the day went, and he keeps reminding us times like this that there is no better place to be than in his house, among his forgiven saints who are also sinners, who together with all the children of Christ throughout the world and time and with the company of heaven know and believe that heaven and its glory will be revealed fully and completely one day. Every time we are here, we get a glimpse of what is come. On this great day, the holiest of holy days, the first day of the week and life, we are blessed with more than a hint of what is to come. Christ is risen. **He is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

For your holiday meal make sure you know your butcher.

I'm Mark Redlinski, and I'm your butcher.

For your holy day celebration make sure you know your pastor.

I'm Bill Kay, and I'm your pastor.

The Rev. William L. Kay

Saturday, April 23, 2011