

April Greetings!



Richard Ondicho's Newsletter 2/2024
4.4.2024

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Our Lenten Journey is over, now what do we do?. During the Holy week we travelled to the upper room on Maundy Thursday with Jesus and his disciples. We travelled to the foot of the cross on Good Friday and heard Jesus utter a lonely cry of abandonment, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me*" (Mk 15:34)?

We heard the words of finality that Jesus spoke with his last breath, "It is finished!" (Jn 19:30), yes, it is finished in paying in full the price for our Sin that separates us from God. And we travelled to the empty tomb to hear again about the group of women that travelled there early on the first day of the week to find it empty. We heard once more the words of the angels at the empty tomb, "*He is not here, but has risen*" (Lk 24:6). Now that resurrection is over what do we do?

Now that we were in March when we celebrated Good Friday and Easter Sunday. April is here which reminds us that Easter is more than just one day. We at Luther-Church Helsinki do believe that Easter is an "every Sunday" celebration during which we come together to receive the fruit of the cross and resurrection of Jesus—the forgiveness of sins and the certainty of eternal life with God. Easter is also an "every day" celebration in which we live each day trusting in God through Christ, knowing that Jesus is "the resurrection and the life" (Jn 11:25) for us.

On Tuesday 2.4 at our weekly Bible study started asking, so what do we do now as we go forth from the empty tomb? Let us follow the example of the first witnesses of the empty tomb. After the two angels reminded Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and the other women that Jesus

had risen, St. Luke tells us that *“they remembered the words, and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest”* (Lk 24:8-9). They went forth from the tomb changed by the resurrection of Jesus. They went forth from the tomb to bring an “every day” witness of God’s power over sin, death, hell, and Satan himself.

Similar to the women at the empty tomb and the eleven disciples, we at the International Lutheran congregation are “every day” witnesses and participants in the resurrection of Jesus. Most of us are not fishermen, but all of us have one or more of these callings: father, husband, mother, wife, son, daughter, brother, sister, grandparent, employee, retiree, friend, and neighbour. Each of these



callings comes with a set of duties and responsibilities. We go forth from Easter Sunday and the celebration of the empty tomb free as God’s forgiven children in Christ. Now we go forth empowered by God’s Spirit living and active within us to live in the joy of the resurrection as “every day” witnesses.

The baptism group at our Congregation meets every Tuesday and Wednesday before our usual Bible study to go through Luther’s small Catechism with the aim of understanding God’s commandments and what is expected of us therein. I feel that I read again and again the ten commandments and Sacraments and confessions and prayers. I feel that I am able to understand my position as a Christian and pastor in the Church of Christ. Now we have six people going through the baptism class I can boldly say that God has continued to call people to faith and now it is time that they learn the contents of Christian faith by hold fast to the Bible verses that are worked through in the small catechism.

One other issue that keeps appearing lately in our Congregation is the deportation of some of our members back to their native land. Like now six people have been deported in less than a month. Some of these Christians have been around our worship service and Bible studies but have never gotten asylum. I have managed to some before they are deported. It feels like the world if unfair but on the other hand who knows that these might be missionaries to witness to their own people although it is not easy to confess their Christian faith openly. It is my prayer that God will give them wisdom and protection that they need.

Lastly when international Congregation was born in 2016, the first friend congregation was Tervola and Savonlinna Lutheran parishes. Recently last month Rev. Heikki Holma (I call him my own Kirkkoherra) retired. I met Rev. Heikki and his wife Leena back in 1999 when I came to Finland to do internship from the theological seminary. I am reminded vividly how Heikki and Leena received me. The memories are as clear as if I met them yesterday. I met my wife Kirsi from Tervola eloseurat. I pray that God will continue to bless Rev. Heikki and give him good health at

this time of retirement. I will always remain thankful for this family and beloved Tervola Congregation for the fond memories from the past and looking forward to visiting there as it has been my tradition.

God's blessings to you for your prayers and financial support.

In Christ

Richard



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