

The Triumph of the Risen Lord!

*TAKEN FROM UNA SANCTA
by: K. Bruning April 12, 1969*

As Walter Chantry so aptly states in his book "Call the Sabbath a Delight" (Banner of Truth Trust, 1991, p.20), the Sabbath day is "an entire day to be 'kept holy'. By this the Scripture means that it is to be set aside from ordinary use, to be devoted to the LORD God. This portion of time is for sacred use – to worship and serve the LORD... This is not a narrow or restrictive requirement. A heart that loves the LORD will leap for joy at the prospect of a day with HIM... for the godly it is a broad road of liberty and joy. There is an entire day each week liberated from my ordinary recreations and labours to serve the lover of my soul and to be with Him". In this light, answers to questions about how and when and where we may spend the Sabbath day (at home or on vacation) become much clearer. The Sabbath is not a holiday with two hour-and-a-half interruptions for worship. The whole day is dedicated to serving God and our neighbour. The Sabbath is also a day to serve our spouse, our children, our extended family and our church family. If we, as Christians, take time each Sunday for personal Bible study and prayer, if we faithfully attend worship service, if we diligently teach our children the precepts of the LORD, if we spend time visiting the sick, lonely, and elderly, if we take time to share in the communion of saints and to sing praise to our most holy God – then suddenly there are hardly enough hours in the Sabbath day for him who desires to serve God and his neighbour. There is so much to do in our own lives, our families, and in the church!

Keeping this day holy also means that we are not to do any work on it – it is the LORD's day. It is not possible to serve God while we pursue our own interests at the mall, watching TV, playing organized sports, etc. The LORD does not give us this day to restrict us. It is a gift of freedom – freedom to serve Him, unrestrained from our daily business. Let us not use our freedom as an opportunity to indulge the flesh! He gives us a much needed excuse to put aside our housework, homework, office work, yard work and leisure pursuits to reflect on His greatness and salvation, His glory and redemption: "Thy face will I seek, O LORD".

We have a covenant with God and our relationship with Him is often described in marital terms; "Let us rejoice and exalt and give Him the glory, for the marriage feast of the Lamb has come and His Bride has made herself ready" (Rev. 19:7). The Sabbath is a perpetual symbol forever of that covenant: "therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a perpetual covenant" (Ex. 31:16). The Sabbath is to be observed by God's people forever. It is a day of celebration of the marriage of the Lamb to His Bride. It is a day to worship the Bridegroom and to find out what delights Him. It is a day to meditate on God's love and

redeeming work through His Son, Jesus Christ. There is great joy in this, for where would we be without His salvation? What could possibly give greater cause for rejoicing and celebration? How then do we celebrate the marriage feast? Is our attitude joyful? "I will rejoice greatly in the LORD...for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels" (Is. 61:10). Can we say the same? Does our dress reflect the celebration of a marriage, the whole day? We are, after all, worshipping our King! Is He not worthy of our best, most reverent attire? In the same way, our attitude should be one of celebration, our minds focused on the Bridegroom and Bride (God and each other), not on the things of this world. God gives us this day to sing His praise and call us back to His ways. Without this day, we would be eternally lost, but He graciously sends faithful ministers who proclaim His Word and call us back to the road of Life. We must receive this Word with joy and humbleness, acknowledging the shepherd as a tool of the Shepherd. It is also a day of communion with fellow believers, with whom we can join in praising God for His steadfast love and mercy. It is also a day of thankfulness for God's abundant provision in our lives. There are many ways to make the Sabbath a joyful celebration. In so doing, we will also pass on a rich heritage to our children.

The Sabbath day is also a day of preparation for the eternal Sabbath, when we will continually serve and praise God. It is a day of rest and renewal, for He only gives the spiritual rest and peace that surpasses all understanding. The LORD gives us this day of rest with the promise of entering into His eternal rest; "So then there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God; for whoever enters God's rest also ceases from his labours as God did from His" (Heb. 4:9&10). We must rest! "And before Him no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:13). God knows our hearts, whether or not it is our sincere desire to serve Him. When that desire is sincere, then we may also know that we will enter into His eternal rest. There we will sing and be joyful, always praising God for His marvelous work.

If we let the wedding image be our guide to Sabbath-keeping, we will find out what delights the Bridegroom and His Bride. If we keep the Sabbath day holy then we will find joy in the LORD, we will be filled with the water of life, without price. Then we can go on our way with joy, triumph, and feasting, truly calling the Sabbath a delight.

"If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the LORD honourable; if you honour it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly; then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride the heights of the earth, I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."
(Is. 58: 13 & 14)

THE WEDDING FEAST

BY FRANCINE BERGSMAN

The setting of this miracle is important to note; it is in the temple by the Gate called Beautiful. The temple is a major theme in the book of Acts, especially in the first half of the book, at the beginning of the Christian Church. The temple is mentioned in Acts 26 times in eleven different chapters, more than in any other book in the New Testament. Peter and the apostles preach in the temple, Stephen announces the destruction of the temple and is martyred for this, and Peter is arrested for not respecting the temple - the same charges for which they crucified Jesus.

We may wonder why the apostles continued observing Jewish customs after the death and resurrection of Jesus. However, there was no clear sign for the formation of the new Church and so it remained within the Jewish tradition even though Jesus had already fulfilled all the ceremonial laws. Peter and the apostles remain, at least for now, as Jews who observe the laws. The temple had to remain until the Jews had been called to the recognition of the Messiah. It was only with the fall of Jerusalem that the Church moved into its own unique historical development. So it is no wonder that this is where Peter and John spoke to the people and to the leaders.

Peter and John were attending the daily prayer at the temple when they met the cripple at the gate called Beautiful. This was probably the gate leading from the court of the Gentiles to the court of Women. An ancient historian noted this gate to be made of Corinthian bronze and that its value would have far exceeded that of the gates crafted with gold or silver. Peter's comment to the cripple about not possessing any gold or silver would then have an added meaning. It is important to note this gate because there were at the time many former Gentiles that came to worship in the temple. However, they would not have been permitted into the court of the Women or any further. By this we know that Peter was addressing a Jew. As such, the cripple would have known about the Lord Jesus, even though he was not a member of the new Church. (If he had been, the Church body would have cared for him [2:44] and he would not have needed to beg for alms.) Later, Peter and John addressed the crowd of astonished witnesses at Solomon's Colonnade. This was a large covered portico ("porch") extending along the entire length of the temple and also a place where the Lord Jesus himself had taught the crowds (Jn 10:22.) As the crowd had witnessed the healing of the crippled man, we know that Peter and John were again addressing mainly Jews familiar with the Old Testament prophecies.

The Healing of the Cripple

The miracle performed was a matter requiring faith. The apostles needed faith to believe that they would be able to heal the cripple through the power of Christ. The cripple needed faith to believe that the name of Jesus could heal him. Perhaps Peter and John gave him their concentrated attention and commanded him to look at them in order to determine through the guidance of the Holy Spirit whether this man had the faith to be healed. The cripple looked at them "expecting to receive something", and indeed he did! Peter spoke and said "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." The phrase "the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth" occurs repeatedly in Acts. (2:38, 3:6, 4:10,18,30, 5:40, 8:12,16, 9:27, 10:48, 16:18, 19:5,13,17, 21:13, 26:9) It can be broken up into the various components. The name 'Jesus' refers back to his earthly role - the birth, ministry, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension. 'Christ' refers to the Messianic role, the exalted Son of God. 'Nazareth' was a matter of further identification and also a part of what Pilate wrote on the sign above Jesus' cross. The cripple would only be healed if he had faith in this name. Faith is what made the use of Jesus' name so powerful. The seven sons of Sceva used Jesus' name without faith and received a beating from the evil spirits they were trying to cast out. (Ac 19:13-16) The seventy-two disciples sent out by Jesus used His name in faith and rejoiced that the spirits obeyed. (Lk 10:17) Like Jesus with the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, Peter takes the cripple's hand and then the miracle takes place and the crippled man's legs were strengthened. Note however, the differences in the way that Jesus healed and that Peter healed. Jesus spoke as one having power and authority and received the greatest honours due to Him because of His divine miracles. Peter speaks in the name of one with authority and accepted honour only as the unworthy servant.

The healing of the cripple attracted attention for several reasons. In the first place, it was done publicly. People were entering the temple at the hour of prayer. The healed man began to leap and jump about. He clung to Peter and John as they entered the temple and praised God. Then a crowd gathered at Solomon's Colonnade as they were leaving the temple after the prayer service. In the second place, there was no doubt as to whether or not a miracle had occurred. The crowds had seen this man begging every day in the temple gate and knew that he was a cripple. In the third place, it was linked to the OT prophecies of Isaiah. The formerly lame man standing beside Peter and John was a visible message proclaiming the power of the Messiah. They could all recall the prophecy of Isaiah concerning the Messianic age as one in which "the lame will leap like a deer." (Is. 35:6) Seeing the wonders of Jesus' ministry continue through His followers, the crowds are astonished. The ridicule heard at Pentecost is absent and the people are open to hear the Good News of His death and resurrection.

The Message

Peter seized the opportunity of the attentive audience and began to share the news of Christ. He addresses them as fellow Jews who thus knew Jesus and His works. Peter began by pointing out clearly that the power of the miracle was not his or John's - but belonged to Jesus Christ who was crucified by them, but arose from the dead. He showed the Jews the greatness of their crime in handing Jesus over to be crucified - but not to drive them to anger or despair. He shows the crowd that they are guilty of murdering the Messiah, the chosen One of Israel. All the terms that Peter uses to describe Jesus are references to Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. (Ps 16:10. Is 52:13ff, Jer 23:5, Zech 9:9 etc.) Only if Jesus was the true Messiah of Israel could his disciples use his name to perform miracles after his death. Peter acknowledges that Jesus was crucified in ignorance and that it happened to fulfill the plan of God. Ignorance, and spiritual blindness is, however, no excuse for sin. But Jesus, as the author/creator of life, is also able to forgive the sins and give eternal life even to His murderers. The crowd sees their guilt before God. Peter tells them with pastoral concern, what to do with their sin. He offers them the prospect of the blessings in the Name of the Servant of the Lord (3:26) and declares that there will be better times ahead if they turn back Jesus. God will allow them to share in the refreshment that is gained through a sense of Christ's pardoning love and from living in the presence of the Lord. These blessings will culminate in the times of restoration at the return of Christ.

However, if the gospel is rejected, the measure of judgment will be full. Peter's use of Moses' prophecies to warn against rejecting the Good News draws a parallel between Christ and Moses. Christ is a prophet "like Moses" but surpasses him in every way. While Moses is a servant in God's house, Christ is a Son. Moses instituted the first covenant, which became obsolete by Christ instituting the second covenant in His blood. Peter mentions that all the prophets speak of Christ and points out that the covenantal blessings promised to Abraham's descendants now come to them through Christ, who blesses by turning them from their evil ways. Wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption and thus, true happiness, come from being turned from sin.

Immediately after Peter's speech, the Sanhedrin arrests Peter and John - but not before large numbers of people were convicted of their need for Christ as the Messiah and repented and were baptized. The small number of followers which Christ left behind was growing rapidly and soon needed organization and officers to handle the growing needs of the Church. The use of His name proved to be the best, the only way to build the Church.

We can do nothing of ourselves, but all things are possible in His name. Although the Lord did not give us a commandment to heal in His name as He gave the disciples, He did command us to use His name when we pray (Jn 14:13-14, 15:16, 16:23-24.) We

are not to use this powerful name simply as a convenient ending for our prayer, or as a formal habit.

We need to recognize that in using His name we ask God to bless us as His followers, that we glorify His name, build in His kingdom and do His will. We also need to use this name in faith. When we pray in harmony with this, God will surely hear our prayers. Prayer, as we are taught, is powerful. We are told to take our needs to the Church officers to pray, for “prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well,” indeed :“the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” (James 5: 13ff) How much more powerful are the prayers of a community of believers? We should be free to share our sorrows, desires and joys with others in the Church so that others can also join us in prayer. However, it is not always God’s will to grant the requests of our prayers. We need to accept that even prayers offered in faith are tainted with sin and full of human desires. If God does not give what we ask in our prayers, He will give us something greater. Does He not want even more for us than we want for ourselves? So we need to pray faithfully, in Jesus’ name, knowing that God will grant our desires if it is the best, but be willing to accept His will. If we do not ask, He won’t hear our requests. If we do not ask, we lack faith in the power of His name. So let us all remember to faithfully pray, for Jesus’ sake.

FOR JESUS' SAKE Acts 3

BY: TAMARA DENHOLLANDER

The day of our daughter's wedding dawned clear and bright. For a few moments I allowed myself to bask in the early dawn light, reflecting on the past weeks and months of preparation for this day. We couldn't be happier for our daughter. The man chosen to be her husband was faithful and upright, considerate and loving. As far as we could see, theirs would be a good marriage, for it was both of their fervent desire to serve God in their life together. After many years of instruction and prayer, we were thankful that the LORD had brought these two children of His together. Later that day, as I watched my daughter walk down the aisle on the arm of her father, resplendent in her white gown, a tremendous realization struck me: this is how our Heavenly Father presents us, the Bride, to His Son, the Bridegroom. In spite of our many sins and shortcomings, He, for the sake of His Son, clothes us in brilliant white, washed clean in the blood of Christ. How marvelous and how awesome, this gift the Father bestows on us! As the day of feasting progressed, another thought took shape in my mind. Our Heavenly Father, because He loves us and has set us apart (made us holy), has also set apart (made holy) a day in which we can wholly devote ourselves to His service. Like a wedding feast, the Sabbath is a day set apart, a day of celebration and thankfulness, and a day of preparation for the eternal Sabbath.

In Acts 3 we again see the power of the Holy Spirit displayed. We first saw it in the speaking of tongues at Pentecost. In Acts 2:43 it is mentioned that the apostles, through the power of the Holy Spirit performed many "wonders and signs." The events of this chapter are, in all likelihood, just one example of these wonders, and Luke uses it as an illustration. Peter is still the main character, now joined by John, continuing the tradition set by Jesus for going out in pairs. (Mk 6:7)

The Lord Jesus Christ spends much time on this point on the day of Easter. All His efforts are directed to this aim, so that His disciples, men and women, will believe in His resurrection. The Lord tries to convince them of His resurrection by signs and messages rather than by His own appearance. It is true that the Lord appears to His followers one or two times that first day, but it is also true that He uses, above all, the open grave, the linen cloths, the angels and the women to proclaim the message of His rising again. The Lord seeks His power not so much in His own appearance as in the preaching and proclamation of His resurrection. And that means a programme for the future!

The church must learn to live with an invisible Lord Jesus Christ; the church must learn to live with His word alone; the church must be trained to live with the Lord through faith in His word and preaching. The Lord Himself withdraws more and more. He prepares His ascension, but He puts His Word and preaching more and more in the forefront. Easter is the start of the gospel preaching of the living Jesus Christ, and calls us to believe in that Word, as the only well of hope and security. Seeing that, the Church will have more encouragement to testify of this word and to preach it in and to an unbelieving world.

‘Jesus said unto her: “Mary!” She turned herself and said unto Him: “Raboni” which is to say: “Master.” John 20:16b This text is also part of the Lord Jesus Christ’s programme. He also uses Mary Magdalene to reveal His glory and to inspire her and His disciples to faith in His resurrection, so that they become enthusiastic witnesses of the living Lord.

The name of Mary Magdalene plays a prominent part in the gospel of Easter. Special attention has been paid to her activities that early morning.

We do not know very much about her, but we do know that she had a strong relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. She was one of the most loyal and sincere disciples of the Lord! That does not surprise us, because she was privileged by the Lord Jesus Christ in a special way. The gospel of Luke (ch. 8:1) tells us that she had been sick; seven evil spirits had her in their grip; she was a victim of the terrible power of the devil. The Lord Jesus Christ had healed her; and from that very moment she believed in Him, and followed Him as one of the most faithful disciples of the Lord. She must have had great expectation from Jesus Christ; and she must have seen in Him the real Messiah of His people and of the world.

Her disappointment on Good Friday is therefore very great. She is at her wit’s end. She mourns greatly, and is far, very far, from hope and faith in a living Lord. The Lord Jesus Christ, however, does not forget her. Soon after His resurrection He takes pity on her, and He spends much care to bring her to faith and joy. Mary proves to be difficult for Jesus. Her unbelief is strong, and it costs the Lord much time and care to bring her to the right point.

Mary Magdalene went at least twice to Jesus Christ’s grave that early morning of Easter. In Mark 16:1-8 Mary Magdalene is among the women who took sweet spices to the grave of the Lord to anoint Him. She and the other women were surprised by an open grave from which the big stone was rolled away. They saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they are frightened. But this young man – he was an angel – tells these very first visitors that the Lord Jesus, whom they sought in the grave, was not there but that He lives; the angel instructed them to go their way to tell Jesus’ disciples and Peter, that the Lord would go before them into Galilee!

Mark tells us also that this great message was not believed by the women! No, they fled from the sepulchre, trembling and amazed, and they do not even respond to the order given by the angel, namely to tell it to the disciples! Mark says: ‘Neither said they any thing to any man, for they were afraid’. That is the result of Christ’s first message of the resurrection; unbelief and therefore unwillingness to announce the glad tidings of His glory.

And Mary's reaction is even worse, when we read John 20. She goes to Peter and tells him an absolutely different story. Despite her experience with the open grave and the words of the angel, she says thoughtlessly: "Peter, they have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we do not know where they have laid Him." Not any word about the angel, not any hint at the words and instruction of the angel. Mary told a story, that is all; and she did it in spite of Jesus' care to open her eyes, and to make her a witness of His glory.

This was Mary's first visit to the grave that morning! It was, however, not the end for Mary. She and other women went back to Jesus' grave, for a second visit. Matthew says in his gospel (chapter 28) that Mary and the other women went to the grave – not with spices, etc. – but to see the sepulchre! They would have a better look at the grave now they had recovered from the first fright.

John 20 says it still clearer: after Peter and John's visit to the grave and their return to their own home (verse 10) we find Mary again at Jesus' grave, weeping and distressed. Mary must have returned to the spot, after having alarmed the disciples Peter and John.

Then happens what our text says: Jesus Christ tried for the second time to open her eyes; and He increased His care, because this time He sent two angels in white, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot, where the body of Jesus had lain. But even this second offensive of the Lord was not sufficient to break her unbelief. She said in verse 13: 'They have taken away My Lord and I know not where they have laid Him.' The same story she had told to Peter and John! Mary was so stubborn in her disbelief, that the Lord Himself had to appear to convince her of His resurrection. The Lord came to her indeed; after more hesitation and complaints from Mary (verse 15), Jesus said, "Mary." In this word He put all the power and energy of His self-revelation. It cleared the mist of her heart and mind; it broke through the crust of her sadness and unbelief, so that she responded: "Rabboni, My Lord, My Master." Jesus overcame Mary in her weakness and hopelessness. His patience was stronger than her despair.

Let us recognise the great sympathy and care of Jesus Christ for this weak woman. The Lord is now in His glory, in the glory of eternal life; He is separated from us, in this respect, that he lives at the other side of the grave and death; He is and remains in eternity. He is with His God and Father. He is far from us; but it does not alter the fact that His communion and blessing remain with us. The glorified Lord has not reduced His exertions for His church on earth. On the contrary, He increases His care more and more, so that His believers all can come to clarity of mind and faith in Him. It is true, we do not see Him; we cannot expect an experience of visible angels and other special things. We live with and believe in an invisible Lord and Master; but we have what Mary missed: the completeness of His word, and the full preaching of His resurrection and ascension.

This word gives us, through the Holy Spirit, the entire knowledge of our complete salvation, because it preaches us our Lord and Master, Who lives to gather all His believers to eternal life.

LISTENING GUIDE

with the sermon

What was for you the message of the sermon?

What in the sermon strengthened your trust in
God?

Does this sermon change your outlook on
yourself, on your neighbour, or on your
surroundings?

What part of the sermon was particularly
striking to you?

What in the sermon would you include in your
prayer?

What was it in your (listening) attitude which
helped to make the sermon effective for you?

Mother's Calling

Based on the book "In Mother's Hand to Jesus" by J. Waterink

The church must learn to live with an invisible Lord Jesus Christ; the church must learn to live with His word alone.

Keeping the Sabbath holy, we will find joy in the LORD, we will be filled with the water of life, without price.

While mother is bringing up to-day's child, she is already bringing up her grown-up child to be. This makes her calling so extremely important. Perhaps it sounds a bit strange, but we might say it this way: even when nursing her infant son, mother should see in him the man who shall have to give leadership in God's kingdom. She must see in her adorable infant daughter, the woman who shall later have to fulfill her godly calling and bear responsibility for the next generation. For this reason, a mother may never view her calling only from the emotional side. Certainly she may be moved by the helplessness of her child and enjoy all the antics of the little one. Secretly she may think his wittiness and follies to be cute, but she may never let the training of her child end there. She must constantly remember that child-training is looking into the future, far ahead.

Ultimately bringing-up a child is not a matter of looking into the future; but it is a looking up to God.. This child was received from Him; God gave His promises for this child. Concerning this child God gives us a calling which reaches its climax in the task to bring up this child for Him. We should not think that the way of the future and the way to heaven are two different roads. Some argue that our bodies must struggle on earth, so we must have certain accomplishments: and our souls must be prepared for heaven, and that these are two different matters. This is a dualism, a division not found in God's Word. It is exactly in the future of this child that it must become clear that he is a child of God. Mother must, as a means in God's hand, guide this child as it grows, into a man or woman who fears and serves the Lord in all of life.

Indeed , it is Mother's calling to express this ideal by her deeds done in faith. This bringing-up in faith finds expression in the fact that she brings up in LOVE. Love understands all things, believes all things, hopes all things... Faith, love and hope - these elements give mother the balance without which she could not function.

Oftentimes, mothers become nervous and upset, fearing for their child the one moment, forgetting themselves: and then the next, fearing for themselves, nag at the children, worry about their shortcomings, complain how busy they are with them. In reaction, they may boast of the virtues of their children, become proud of their good

behaviour or show off brand-name clothes for the children. In doing this, mothers do not live in the full realization of their calling which, should give them a queenly calmness. This calmness results from prayer. A godly mother knows that only the Lord, who gave her the assignment, can and will give her the strength to carry it out.

The response to the calling begins with mother herself. A mother who does not pray cannot teach her child to pray. A mother who has little faith and who does not show faith in her daily life cannot show her child the beauty of faith. If she does not know the power of hope, she cannot speak of the glory of the hope that is in us. A mother who does not daily live in love shall only speak in vain to her child of love. It is very true that in the final analysis we must look to God for a blessing upon the rearing of our children. But, it is equally true that the Lord uses parents as means; and that, for the young child He gave the mother a special calling to train the child.

Now it is true as the saying goes, that God can use a crooked stick to give a straight blow. And it is also true that despite our shortcomings, God blesses our work in a wonderful way. At the same time, it is a fact that there is a connection between the blessing which God gives and the manner in which we do our work. God has given us insight into the means that are at our disposal, and we must use these means in the way He asks of us in His Word. "He who waters will also be watered himself." Prov.11:25.

A mother who is daily aware of her calling, clinging to God's promises, will live close to God in prayer as she realizes the requirements for her own life. People will notice the strength of her life, her faith in the Lord. It is necessary that mothers get rid of selfish motives and narrow mindedness; they have to overcome personal shortcomings, and wrong ambitions. There is no greater danger than to make yourself the centre of everything. Mothers have to learn not to put themselves first, but to focus on God's law. God gives Christian mothers such a great promise: 'In the keeping of God's commands there is great reward.' Of ourselves we are unable to do that. Therefore as Christ has to increase, we as mothers must decrease.

With this conviction, a mother can fulfill her calling. In faith, she can, with the family give to her, teach her children of Jesus Christ, their Saviour.