

*“And one of the elders said to me, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.””*

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

I think that after the strange weather we’ve had the past few weeks, we were glad to come to the end of March. While Calgary weather can be strange at the best of times, it does seem that March is one of the strangest months of the year. At the very least it may be the most schizophrenic. For much of Canada, March is the bridge between the last of the cold, dark days of winter, and the eagerly awaited days of sunshine and warmth that come in spring. But even as we enjoy the first days of spring, we still can’t be sure that we are truly past the cold and stormy days of winter.

March has a character all its own. It has been said that if the month of March enters as a lamb, with warm, calm weather it will go out like a lion, roaring with the last storms of winter. Of course, the opposite is also said to be true; that if it comes in like a lion, it will go out like a lamb. In Calgary we can get both extremes day by day—sometimes even on the same day! You will have to decide for yourself whether or not this old bit of folk-lore is actually true.

In like a lamb; out like a lion. In many ways that describes the wonderful events we are celebrating today. On this Easter weekend, we rejoice that our Lord Jesus Christ, the One whom Isaiah says is *“like a lamb that is led to the slaughter”* (Isaiah 53:7, ESV) now emerges as the Lion of Judah, the victor over sin, death and hell itself. Best of all, His victory is our victory, as He lives to bring life and salvation to all who put their trust in Him.

We may not like it too much if March comes in like a lamb, and goes out like a lion, as we saw in the past few days of this March. But when it comes to our salvation, this shift from lamb to lion is indeed a blessing. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the single greatest event in all of human history. It is the greatest surprise in all of history, too, even though Jesus spoke many times of His resurrection; and even though the promises of His resurrection were prophesied throughout the Scriptures. But somehow, those prophecies and promises seemed to elude the very people closest to Jesus: his disciples. The gospel lesson today tells us of the women who came to the tomb, expecting to anoint the lifeless body of Jesus, preparing it properly for burial. The disciples were gathered together in a locked room, fearful for their very lives. They weren’t waiting in joyful expectation of the resurrection. They were sad, confused and defeated. The Lord they loved was dead, and they didn’t understand why. What had He ever done to hurt anyone? All He had ever done was help those in need. When He spoke, He spoke words of love and forgiveness. He spoke of the kingdom of God, and the mercy of God for sinners. There was nothing vicious or threatening in anything He did. But now He was dead, the victim of the cruel hatred of men, who simply refused to accept the wonderful things He said and did.

But there was a greater purpose in all this. John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and said, *“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”* (John 1:29, ESV) What the disciples so often failed to understand; what our world so often fails to understand, is that Jesus is the Lamb of God; the Lamb who comes to be the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the entire world. He came to give His life for you and for me, to bear the punishment for our sins in His own body. So often we would like to think that God should merely turn a blind eye to the sinful, spiteful, selfish things we do day by day; after all, that’s what we do. We don’t pay much attention to our sin; in fact, we are far too comfortable with it. But the consequences of sin are great indeed. James tells us: *“Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”* (James 1:15, ESV) Sin separates us from God, and the life He wanted mankind to enjoy. The all-holy Lord of all cannot allow sin to go unpunished. But God also doesn’t want us be cut off from Him forever. And so He gives the perfect lamb for the perfect sacrifice. On the cross, the Lamb of God does take away the sin of the world, as He suffers the punishment that you and I deserve.

But the Lamb that is laid in the tomb is not defeated, not even by death itself. And that, my dear people loved by God, is the real joy of this day. The Saviour who died, the Lamb of God who is crucified for you and me, now rises in triumph. He may have been as meek and gentle as a lamb, as He allows Himself to be arrested, to be mocked and abused; to be nailed to that

cross to suffer its shame and pain. He may have gone into that tomb as a lamb, but He comes out like a lion. The lion has long been a symbol of royalty, majesty and victory. Kings have often used a lion as their symbol on royal crests, like those of Richard, the Lion-hearted. The lion is the king of beasts, known for its power and strength. And truly, it is in direct contrast with a lamb, typically considered one of the meekest of all animals. In His resurrection, the Lord is no longer the meek little lamb. He is the mighty king, who has triumphed over His foes. He has won the victory that needed to be won, over sin and death and hell. He has done battle with the devil, who is also referred to in Scripture as *“a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”* (1 Peter 5:8, ESV) But the stronger, mightier Lion has defeated Him. Jesus died, yes, but He rose again, never to die again. The Lamb of God has become the Lion of Judah, the mighty One, whose triumph is our assurance of victory, too.

And that, dear friends, is our joy this Easter Sunday, but also the joy of each day of our lives. The Lion of Judah brings us His victory. He has not simply destroyed His enemies. He has destroyed our enemies. As St. Paul declares: *“Death is swallowed up in victory.” “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* (1 Corinthians 15:54-57, ESV)

In the resurrection of Jesus Christ, everything is different for us. We struggle in this world of sin, often overwhelmed by the troubles, worries and griefs that come our way. We keep hoping and longing for an end to COVID; an end to the restrictions and fears; an end to the separation and uncertainty. We are tired of the contradictory and confusing messages. We are hopeful that things will change, for we long for some normalcy in our lives. Sadly, it doesn't end there. Many people, including many of our members are still looking for work, still needing employment in the midst of a depressed economy here in Alberta. We will have a funeral here this week, remembering a brother in Christ, saddened by the separation and pain death causes. Perhaps we are starting to feel more and more the fleeting reality of life in this world. Illness, pain and age may be catching up with us. Some of you feel that time is coming, either for yourself or for some friend or family member. Or maybe you are just struggling with life itself. Maybe there are problems in your home. There are the people who just seem to want to make our lives as miserable as possible, who show their contempt and hatred for us in all they do. There is so much uncertainty, strife and pain in this world. And we just can't stop it from affecting us, overwhelming us, and dragging us down.

But the Risen Lord, the Lion of Judah stands with us in the midst of the greatest struggles of our life. He is our comfort in the face of death. He is our shield and defender in the worst attacks the devil can throw at our life. This is not to say that life is a picnic, or a bed of roses for God's people. Jesus doesn't say that His victory makes everything wonderful in this world. We have to keep going back to His words: *“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”* (John 16:33, ESV)

Yes, Jesus has overcome the world. That is exactly what the resurrection tells us. The Lion of Judah has defeated all the enemies of your soul. Those who trust in Him share in His victory. No matter what may come, we have the assurance to be able to say: *“If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”* . . . *“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (Romans 8:31-32; 38-39, ESV)

Jesus is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. But He is also the Lion of Judah, the victor over sin, death and hell. And that changes everything for the better for those who trust in Him. Sir Winston Churchill planned his own funeral service. At the beginning of the service, a trumpeter was to sound “Taps”, the traditional call at the end of the day. But at the end of the service people were surprised to hear “Revelry”, the call that the new day had begun. Churchill was witnessing to the world that while the days of his earthly life were coming to an end, the eternal day was just beginning.

Since the Lamb of God comes forth as the victorious Lion of Judah, our salvation is secure. Faith is our bugle call of revelry, even in the face of death. That is what Easter is all about. On Good Friday, we see the Saviour pouring out His life-blood for us upon the cross. The Lamb of God dies on the cross, as the sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the whole world. It seems that all is finished, and we hear the mournful notes of “Taps” reminding us that the end has come. But it isn't the end. The Saviour isn't in the tomb. The Lamb, who was slain, rose again from the dead. With a mighty roar of triumph, the Lion of Judah rises from the dead, having conquered sin, death and hell for us. In Him, the new day has begun. We hear the joy of revelry in our hymns of alleluia today. He lives and because He lives, we know that one day we too will rise to be at home and at rest in the glorious, perfect and blessed home God has prepared for His people. Amen.