

Now All the Vault of Heaven Resounds

This Sunday is the 2nd Sunday of Easter, one of six that comprise the 50 Days of Easter in our church calendar. Perhaps this extended focus on Easter seems a bit strange to us. Why sing more Easter hymns and continue to respond with Alleluias? Christ's resurrection assures our resurrection and promises us victory over sin and death. After the empty tomb, an announcement of life beyond death, and a glorious Easter morning celebration of the Resurrection of our Lord, what more is there to say or sing?

For centuries, Christians have gathered to hear and sing the news of our Lord's resurrection. Whether through the reflective but triumphant words of an ancient plainsong, "Christians, to the Paschal Victim," or the florid strains of "Alleluia" in Charles Wesley's "Jesus Christ is Risen Today," people across continents and centuries have written hymns to proclaim Christ crucified and risen. Today we sing one of the more recent additions to the volume of Easter hymns that have spanned these many years—"Now All the Vault of Heaven Resounds" written by American Lutheran pastor and poet Paul Zeller Strodach. (1876-1947) and first published in the 1958 Lutheran Service Book and Hymnal.

At first glance, the opening phrases of this hymn provide words of bold proclamation:

"Now all the vault of heav'n resounds in praise of love that still abounds: Christ has triumphed! He is living!"

Perhaps these words seem perfect for Easter Sunday, but out of place a week later. So often, we confine the news of our Lord's resurrection to one celebratory moment, forgotten and swept away as soon as Easter chocolates leave the grocery store shelves. Thankfully, our hymn writer knew something different. The gift of Jesus' resurrection was not only good news for the women at the tomb. It is good news for those who follow in faith! Christ is living now — today! — that the good news of his triumph over death might resound continually in heaven and on earth.

How is a "continual song of resurrection" possible? What does this sound like? What does this look like? If such a sentiment sounds more like a pious platitude than reality, consider the words of the third stanza:

"Oh, fill us, Lord, with dauntless love... grant grace sufficient for life's day that by our lives we truly say: 'Christ has triumphed! He is living!' Alleluia!"

In stanza three, this hymn of confidence turns to words of prayer. Though Easter surrounds us with lilies and good news, the author knows "life's day" can quickly deliver the opposite. When despair, depression, doubt, disease or death strike, it is easy to say: "What are you going to do? That's life!" One day of life can teach us this difficult reality. In such moments, we stand in need of God's grace, and pray in this hymn we might stand confident in Christ's triumph — even as life deals us its inevitable difficulties. In this way, our Lord's victory is a continual song, where the challenges of each day are met with a constant refrain: "*Christ has triumphed! He is living!*"

God knows the world stands in need of new life today. Easter means there is no delay in offering Christ's good news of resurrection. The second and fourth stanzas help us sing of this promise today:

*"Eternal is the gift he brings, therefore our heart with rapture sings: 'Christ has triumphed! He is living! Now still he comes to give us life and by his presence stills all strife...'
Adoring praises now we bring and with the heav'nly blessed sing: 'Christ has triumphed! Alleluia!'"*

These stanzas are a study in contrast. Though Christ's victory over death is an "eternal gift" to all people, God does not wait until eternity to give us this gift of life. Instead, in words spoken and sung, the message of Easter is proclaimed today. When our risen Lord speaks, the strife of this world comes to an end, and those on earth are joined with the voices of heaven: "*Christ has triumphed! He is living!*"

In this good news, we sing today, across these 50 days of Easter, throughout all of life and forever around the throne of the Lamb.

**Come and worship the Risen, Living Christ
10 AM service with Holy Communion**