



Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue  
in the City of New York

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[www.SaintThomasChurch.org](http://www.SaintThomasChurch.org)

**Sunday, March 20, 2010**  
*The Second Sunday in Lent*

*Choral Evensong*  
*at 4pm*

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A Sermon by  
The Reverend Victor Lee Austin, Ph.D.

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*THE THIRD DAY HE ROSE AGAIN FROM THE DEAD*  
*(Apostles' Creed Series, Sermon 8)*

Today we are at the exact middle of our sermon series on the creed: the 8<sup>th</sup> out of 15 sermons. It seems fitting to pause to acknowledge the gratitude that all of us clergy have for the many positive responses to this series, from choir boys (who do indeed listen to sermons!) and gentlemen of the choir to the many of you who greet us at the door and also those who listen to our services on the web.

We are in the middle of the series, and right here is the pivot point of all things: the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. That Jesus Christ suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; that he descended into hell—these are profound events in the fulfillment of God's desire to be in solidarity with us. Since the foundation of the world, God has been not merely our manufacturer, the cause of our being—great and mysterious as creation is in itself. God has also desired, always desired, to enter into our world, our life, our history, to be one with us. You can manufacture something without loving it. Indeed, if you love something that you manufacture, we might think you a bit odd in the head. We understand the fellow who likes his clay pot, because he made it, but when he starts talking lovingly to his pot, when he focuses his whole life on what he calls the happiness of his clay pot, we think something has gone wrong with him, poor fellow. But God, who brought us into being just as surely as a potter shapes a pot, seems to be wacko in just that way. He unceasingly longs to be part of the world that he has made, and particularly to be a human being with us. He loves us.

And so he would share everything that's ours. He was conceived. He was born. He suffered. He died. And he experienced what it is to be dead. He came from heaven and went all the way down to hell. He came as the source of light and life and experienced humanity completely all the way down to darkness and death.

And if that had been the end of the story, it would have been a sad story, yet a poignant and beautiful story. It would have been a story of God achieving what he had always wanted: to be one of us, to be one of us all the way to the end.

But here is the pivot, the Archimedean leverage point from which God moved the world. *He rose from the dead*. He was dead, and he was with the dead, and from that terminus (from which no one returns) he returned: *he rose*. Easter morning is the event that shook the world. Archimedes famously said that if he had a pivot point and a lever of sufficient length he could move the world. We have recently seen the enormity of the power that's within creation when the crust of the earth moved, what was it?, a tiny bit: 25,000 miles is the diameter of the earth, its crust moved but (as I understand it) eight feet: and the vibrations were 8.9 on the Richter scale, the volume of unleashed water unimaginable, the extent of devastation still unfolding and unknown. But the resurrection shook the world more. The resurrection is more powerful than earthquake, tsunami, fire and flood. God is infinitely more powerful than any power in the world—infininitely more powerful than anything in the earth, even the unimaginable forces held within the earth's crust, a tiny fraction of which power we have recently seen so awfully.

Yet it is wrong to say that God is “more powerful” as if we could say, look at the power of the earth; God is even more powerful than that. For God's power is not on the same scale.

It is the power which is able to come to the complete end which is death—and then rise.

To say that Jesus is alive today is to say that Jesus is a living dead man. He is a living conceived man, a living born man, a living suffering man, a living dead man, a living buried man. He is a living man who descended into hell. He is a man who rose from the dead.

This, I say again, is the pivot point of the universe. It is the event in history which no subsequent history can erase or undo. There is a man who had a complete life—from conception to death—who is alive: and nothing ever will be able to kill him now.

The resurrection of Jesus is the one event in history that cannot be gone back upon. An army may win a battle, but later lose the ground. Riches may be built up, yet later scattered. Clothes may be made, and then eaten by moths. We may build libraries, but future generations may put them to the torch. Nothing that we do is final. Everything can be changed, modified, advanced, corrupted, gained or lost. Except this, the center point of history. Death has been turned around. We have a brother, whose name is Jesus, who is alive and cannot die. No matter what happens he will not die.

And because that is true, because, as I just said, he has made us his brother, which is to say because he has loved us from the beginning and wanted to be with us—what has happened to him can happen to us. Robert Jenson, theologian and friend of our parish, puts it in this paradoxical way: “Because Jesus has died, I can die.” Jesus' death makes it possible for my life to have a meaning, to have an end, to come to its point. “Because Jesus has died”—which is God achieving his point, which was to share our human life completely—because of that, “I can die,” I can have a life which has a point, precisely as my life is lived with Jesus.

Aquinas has a charmingly down-to-earth explanation of the phrase that begins this line of the creed, “The third day.” He says that Jesus was raised on the third day because, if it had been sooner, we might not have believed he was really dead. And it was not later, Aquinas also says, because we might have given up hope if we had had to wait longer. We need to know both that Jesus died and that he was raised. We need to know that the resurrection does not make the death unreal. We need to know that Jesus' life had an end, and that precisely as a man whose life ended

he was raised to a new life. What that new life is, and what it means for us, is what the rest of the creed is about. For Jesus the new life is ascension, and session at the Father's right hand, and a glorious return to judge. And for us, the resurrection means the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the church, and the sacraments, and forgiveness, and everlasting life. All those things are infinitely more powerful than anything we can imagine, and infinitely more powerful than any power on earth. They are the power of the love that always wanted to, and in history did, live a complete human life, who, having done so to the end, rose.