

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

For Christians in an elevator, that is the best elevator speech ever.

An elevator speech is the practice of condensing the point of a presentation to a simple phrase or concept that can be shared in the time it takes for an elevator to go from one floor to another.

My elevator speeches depend on hospital and nursing home elevators that are timed *v e r y s l o w l y*.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Best elevator speech— fast or slow.

But say one of those other Christians in the elevator is a skeptic, and retorts: So what?

Then St. Paul's speech in 1 Corinthians is helpful:

Jesus risen from the dead is the beginning of what will happen to all the dead.

He is the first-fruits, the first human being to experience resurrection after the complete destruction of death.

Mortality is the result of the sin of Adam and Eve from the very beginning, and we are all subject to it.

But Immortality is now possible for us through Jesus.

As all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ – first Jesus, then when he comes again, those who are baptized. Then Christ will destroy all earthly powers that oppose God and the immortal realm of God will be the new world order.

That's so what.

But maybe we don't remember the details of our death in Adam – and it is important that we do, because then much of the Easter message makes so much more sense.

We have to look at Genesis 3.

We know about Adam and Eve in the garden, and the serpent, and the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

We know that God had given everything to humanity,

but they chose to transgress the single boundary God's Word had established,

breaking the covenant of life God had made with them.

At the end of Genesis 3, the Lord God ejected humanity from the garden to work the land for sustenance

and had placed cherubim and a flaming sword –and here is the key – *“To guard the way of the tree of life.”*

This phrase “Way of the tree of Life” or “Way of life” or simply “Way” came to be used by God in covenants to restore humanity from sin and death,

and it was used by the prophets as a reference to God's promised messiah.

It also became the first name for the followers of Jesus.

In Genesis, God speaks of the Way by which the life-giving covenant with Abraham – descendants – would be fulfilled

In Exodus, in the wilderness of Sinai, the Lord God says *Behold, I send an Angel before you, to keep you in the way,*^{H1870} *and to bring you into the place which I have prepared.*

The Psalms are filled with references to the way.

Ezekiel's Son of Man is caring for the way of life.

Isaiah and Malachi both speak of one who would prepare the Way of the Lord.

And then Jesus comes, who is the Way and the Truth and the Life.

He comes to prepare a place for us in the Father's house.

Jesus is the Way of the Tree of Life

kept safe until God's right time.

God repeatedly led his people back to the Way of Life, but they kept straying off the path.

God's mercy is unceasing, but the pattern of human rebellion was also unceasing. Where would it end?

God would have to suffer the consequences of human sin and redeem humanity for himself.

God's will took on a human body to live a life of obedience and redemption for the whole human race.

Jesus Christ is God walking the Way of the Tree of Life himself, so that the way of the tree of life becomes accessible once more to humanity.

But what about those cherubim and the flaming sword?

It is Jesus' forgiveness of our sins that turns them back to let us enter.

Peter says it well to the religious authorities:

³⁰ The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. ³¹ God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. ³² We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

It is precisely this forgiveness,

this reconciliation through Jesus

that unbars the way of the tree of life

which Jesus opens to the apostles in that upper room on the day of his resurrection, when he stretches out his wounded hands, breathes on them, and gives them God's Shalom, peace, with the Holy Spirit.

In this moment, the cherubim and flaming sword that bar the entrance to the tree of life in the midst of the garden are removed for them,

as they had been removed for Jesus when he rose from the dead.

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So, now Jesus is risen, and the apostles in the upper room are on their way to resurrection, But what about us?

Jesus sent those apostles with the Shalom peace of God and the Holy Spirit to share his forgiveness with others:

²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

We might remember the promise Jesus had made to Peter much earlier:

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Here in that upper room, those keys were given – not just to Peter, but to all the apostles, and through them to the whole church.

Thomas is our guy – he was not there at first, but was included when Jesus breathed on him and showed him his wounds.

We, too, are included in much the same way.

Jesus risen breathes the Holy Spirit on us in Holy Baptism and shows us his wounds in his body and blood given and shed for us in Holy Communion.

Through the church, Jesus risen speaks his forgiveness to us so that the cherubim and flaming sword are removed from the way of the tree of life for us.

Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life for us to enjoy eternal life, immortality, the fullness of wholeness in the presence of God.

Let us live his life in our world,
sharing forgiveness with others,
and being instruments of God's Shalom peace in our world.

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