Alleluia! Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, by his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Dear Branches of the True Vine,

It was over! Finally over! The news spread quickly. Parades flooded streets around the nation, really around the world. Crowds gathered and cheered. Strangers hugged, even kissed. They sang. They prayed. They woke up the next day and read the papers. It was real. They really won! It was over. Now what?

We know what. The soldiers came home from Europe and Japan. They got married. They started families. They got to work. The nation couldn’t what they had lost, what had been sacrificed, families mourned. They never forgot the evils they witnessed, the horrors of humanity at its worst. They never forgot the battle, but they remembered the reason they fought. They fought for life, so life they lived.

Now what? Jesus lives! The victory’s won! Satan is crushed. Death is broken. Sin has been wiped out forever. Easter Sunday we celebrate! We sing. We pray. We eat together. The next Sunday, confessing Thomas shows us, yes, this is real! Death’s reign is done! Again, Jesus stands there among his people, proclaiming peace, real peace! Forgiveness is yours to have. Forgiveness is yours to give. Again, the Good Shepherd calls. He will never abandon his flock and he keeps them safe so that they can flourish in the truth. Now what?

John knows what. We remember not only what Jesus has saved us from but also what he has saved us for. This is what, Live in the resurrection reality. That is live in love by living in Christ.

People will often say what they are gonna do. What they are gonna achieve. Who they are gonna be. They may even mean it when they say it. The person entering college has an idea of what she wants to do after graduation, but often the world waiting on the other side of school isn’t what she expected. The young man may say how he will grow up, mature, be a good man, but the habits of youth are not so easy to shake off. We all say we want to be good people. Who doesn’t ever try to be kind? Who in their right mind advocates for cruelty? Who doesn’t think that love is good? Who doesn’t want to be on the right side of history?

John warns, talk is easy. We are prone to confuse the idea of love, the desire to love, even saying what we think is the “loving” thing with love itself. John literally tells God’s people, **Do NOT love with a word nor with a tongue.** Your tongue, your speech is the least effective way to love. Instead, your tongue is the most efficient way to avoid love. You can say the right thing, and everyone will think well of you; you don’t have to do anything. You can be on the right side, and you feel good, even if you never leave your couch.

When we see disasters happening far away, but the scene affects us. We can’t ignore such a thing so, what do we do, we send our thoughts and prayers. But we don’t just pray, no no, we have to *announce* that we are praying, that we will pray, that we intend to pray. I wonder how many have said, thoughts and prayers, but they forgot even do this. Do Christians not deserve the scorn of the unbelievers if that is our response to *every* disaster? The uselessness of loving in word and tongue is universal. Saying feed the hungry, doesn’t put food on any plate. Chanting no justice no peace brings neither justice nor peace. Yard signs help no one. Facebook posts aren’t make the world a better place. No demonstration of how fervently you care has done anything to lift up the suffering.

Our culture says much. We say much. We do little. I can hear the excuses now. Well, what can I do? What can I do for those who are suffering in the Levant? What can I do for Ukraine and Russia? What can I do for migrants? What can I do for those facing disaster? A few might be able to go, volunteer, get their hands dirty and help, but most, almost all, cannot. Some might give a little money, but the needs outweigh our ability to donate. **The poor you will always have.** Jesus says. Is sending our thoughts and prayers the best we can do?

Who told you, you had to do anything? This is a problem of modern technology, modern news. Are these things your responsibility at all? When the troubles in the world weigh on your heart, indeed pray, place them in the Lord’s hands, He will handle it according to his wisdom. Will your words add anything? Instead of saying, pray, do it! No one but God needs to know, Jesus says, pray in your locked room. John says, **Do NOT love with a word or with a tongue.** Sadly when we care for things we cannot change, when we “love” people far away, this isn’t real love, it is avoiding love.

Perhaps we need to consider our Lord’s example when he took human flesh and lived in humility. Were there not problems in the ancient world? No disasters? No injustice? Yet, in his day to day actions, did Jesus set out to, as many try to today, change the world? To perfect society? For thirty years, God’s incarnate Son was just Joseph’s son, the craftsman. I wonder how many homes in Nazareth had repairs Jesus did with his own two hands! Even after his ministry began, he was a healer, yes. But always one on one with the people he met on his way. He didn’t solve the problem of disease. He was a provider, he gave bread to the crowds when they were in a remote place, but he didn’t solve world hunger. He was a teacher, but he didn’t advocate for a new education system. Jesus lived what John writes for us. **But let us love in action and truth.**

We cannot imagine that the little things of life, being a husband, a wife, a friend, a worker, a member of your community, that these unspectacular every day things, don’t matter; they mattered to Jesus! We can only understand what it means to love in action and truth, by looking at him. Love done for yourself, for your image, for your self-esteem, for your righteousness, for your conscience isn’t love at all. That isn’t service, it is self-service. Love, true love, genuine love, cares nothing for self; love always serves the other. When you love in action and truth, you give of yourself, of your time, of your energy, of your physical blessings for the good of another. For the good of the body, feed, clothe, shelter, care. God has placed in your life who need you. Love them. When they don’t need so great a portion of your love, extend it to those all around you. Love in action and truth cares for more than the body. It cares for the soul. Love that excuses sin, love that enables sin, love that ignores sin, love that lies about sin, cannot be love. That means love in action and truth will often cost you much, even more than your time and your possessions. John says, **do not be surprised if the world hates you.** And the words of Jesus speak to our hearts **fear not, I have overcome the world.**

This is what it is live in the resurrection reality. Jesus has died for your sins. He has baptized you into his name, clothed you in his righteousness. You are his children; you are heirs of God. You have nothing to earn. You have nothing to prove. You are completely set free to live in love. Let God handle a world that still seems at war with good, at war with God, and enamored with sin. God has placed you here. God has place you into the lives of many others. You have plenty of work to do. You have plenty of love to give. Live in such a love.

When we live in love, when we go about doing the work God has given you. God also blesses you in that work. **This is how we know we are of the truth and how we set ourselves at rest in his presence.** When we devote our lives to the purpose God gives, we rest in peace at night. When our days our filled with the work God has given, our hearts are reassured, I can’t save the world, but I did what God has asked of me.

However, that feeling is illusive for me. I often find myself focusing on all I failed to do, all I left undone, and sadly what I have chosen to do instead of what God has given me. When I look to my love for my reassurance, I don’t find rest, I find condemnation. I am not alone. John felt this way too. **If our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and he knows all.** Luther captured this powerful truth beautifully, “The conscience is one drop, the reconciled God is a sea of comfort.” Our failures are nothing compared to God’s success. Your defeats will never rob Jesus of his victory. Your sin can never erase Jesus’ sacrifice of love. Your weakness will never hold back God’s powerful forgiveness. Your conscience doesn’t even know how God smiles on you and your work, but God knows. No one sees the cup of water you gave in his name, but Jesus sees. You may ask, Lord, when did we do any of these things for you. God knows all. When all your sin has been taken away, removed as far as the east is from the west, when in Christ, your sin is the ONLY thing God cannot remember, all that remains are the works you did for him!

Therefore, do not let your heart condemn you, you live in Jesus. You live in forgiveness. You live free to love in God’s wonderful grace. This is what we need to live in the resurrection reality. **Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God.** John encourages that we can live in that confidence already, right now. **We also receive from him whatever we ask, because we keep his commands and do what is pleasing in his sight.** You never need to hesitate to pour your heart out to the Lord. You do not need to hold back the desires of your heart. God leaves no doubt that he will always hear, he will listen intently, he will always answer for your good. The devil lists all the reasons you cannot pray, why you should not pray, why your prayers will do you no good, but he lies. Nothing will ever keep God from hearing your prayers. Nothing can hinder him from working all things for your good. He will always give you what you need. He will always provide you with the power to be about his business. Pray in that confidence. Live in that confidence

At what point do you stop adding things to your to-do list. The list never seems to shrink. Although knowing what needs and prioritizing it can ease our minds, although that check can be really satisfying, sometimes we end up serving our to-do lists, instead of letting the list serve us. We all know that none of the most important things of life actually make it on that list.

When I look at my to-do list, I can’t help but notice how different it is from the one the Lord gives here. His only has two items. **This is his command: that we believe in his Son, Jesus Christ, and that we love one another just as he commanded us.** God’s list is short. God’s list is easy. On one hand, everything God desires of us is already done, on the other hand, we will never run out of things we can do to please God and serve each other. Jesus said, **The one who remains in me and I in him is the one who bears much fruit.** John repeats the thoughts of his Lord, **The one who keeps his commands remains in God and God in him.** We remain in God by faith in Jesus, faith in who he is, God’s Son, the Messiah. Faith in what he has done, died for us, risen for us. Faith in what he guarantees, the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. And this faith will produce good fruit. Those who live in the God of love will love as God loves them. Those who live in God’s forgiveness can live confidently and joyfully through every moment of their lives.

The victory is won! All enemies are defeated! Of course that is worth celebrating. Of course, that day is worth commemorating. Of course we will sing. Of course we will take a few weeks to revel in that joy and let that reality fully take hold. We cannot end there. A victory of this magnitude must be lived. Our Lord won this victory so that you can live. Live in him. Live in love. Live in faith. Live in confidence. This is why he came. This is why he lived. This is why he died. This is what his resurrection secured. Your life. Your full life. Your true life. For this, he has left no doubt. For this, he has given you assurance. For this, he has filled you with his power. For this he has given you his Holy Spirit. By his power which dwells in you, you know what to do, live in his resurrection reality today and forever. Amen.