



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

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EASTER SUNDAY

2014

“He Has Risen, As He Said”

(Matthew 28:5)

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“Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said” (Mt. 28:5).

Collect of the Day

Almighty God the Father, through Your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, You have overcome death and opened the gate of everlasting life to us. Grant that we, who celebrate with joy the day of our Lord's resurrection, may be raised from the death of sin by Your life-giving Spirit; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

You recall on that first Good Friday, at the end of the day, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus did the messy work of prying that bloody corpse off the cross. They wrapped it up with linen and spices, and placed it in Joseph's own tomb which was nearby and cut out of the side of a steep hill. Time was short because of the approaching Sabbath when no work was allowed. They did the best they could with the time they had, but still, it was a hurry-up job.

The next day the chief priests and Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, "We remember how that imposter said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.'" Before Pilate, they worry out loud that his disciples might steal away his remains and then *claim* he was risen from the dead. And so their request is for Pilate to make the tomb secure.

True to form, Pilate isn't interested. In fact, my sense is he's just about had it with these men, after the way they manipulated things on Friday. He's in no mood to accommodate them anymore. So he says "Your problem, not mine. Take care of it with your own troops" referring to the Jewish temple guards. So, they do. They post a number of men to guard the tomb, and seal it as an additional precaution. They are taking no chances.

Now it's Sunday, very early, just before sunrise. Two women are going out to the tomb. They're going to make sure Jesus was given a proper burial. As they approach, they feel the tremors of an earthquake. Then, suddenly, there's the blazing white light of an angel at the tomb, sitting on the stone that he had already removed. Of course, the women are

terrified by the presence of the angel. Who wouldn't be? But they are also alarmed because those temple guards are lying about like dead men, literally, like corpses. Apparently they fainted or collapsed. Do you note the irony? Those assigned to guard the corpse have themselves become like corpses, while the one they were supposed to be guarding is very much alive and well.

The angel then speaks to the women. "Do not be afraid", which is what angels always have to say (and by the way, if you see an angel and he doesn't say that, you know there's trouble ahead). In any event, he says to the woman, "Do not be afraid." It doesn't come through our English translation, but the Greek includes an emphatic pronoun. "**You** need not be afraid" he says to them . . . in contrast to these guards lying around.

And then the Good News: "I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said." Notice the precision of language the angel uses. "You are looking for Jesus who was crucified." Not any old Jesus (for that was a common name), but the one who was executed by crucifixion. And then, "He has risen from the dead." Not just, "he has risen". This isn't just a metaphor for how his teachings live on, or how he lives on in our hearts so long as we remember him. None of that nonsense! No. The corpse of Jesus was in the tomb, and now . . . he is alive. He was irrevocably dead, dead as dead gets, made that way by Roman soldiers who were good at crucifying people and had a lot of practice doing it. They crucified Jesus until dead, and, just to remove any doubt they plunged a spear into his side. That one, who was dead, is now vigorously alive. He's not convalescing in some rehab center. No. He has risen.

And note also those words, "He is not here, for he has risen *as he said*." Those words recall the prophecies Jesus made in connection with his death and resurrection, and there are a bunch. For example, in John 10, Jesus said, "I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have

authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.” In other words, the angel is gently reminding the women that Jesus said it would happen this way.

The angel continues, “Go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead.” The women are not only themselves the first witnesses of the empty tomb, but are also the chosen messengers to convey the amazing news to Jesus’ disciples

The angel’s final words to the women are, “See, I have told you.” That marks the end of his message. And it’s also a call to action. He’s done his job. He’s delivered the news. And now it’s up to the women. They are the custodians of the message. “Go quickly and tell his disciples.” The angel is not making a request here. He’s not asking them to think about it or pray about it. He’s issuing an order. “Go quickly . . .” This Good News cannot reach their ears soon enough.

So the women “departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.” Their emotions are mixed. Their fear surely has something to do with that angel and all those temple guards lying around like corpses. The angel said they shouldn’t be afraid, but you know . . . easier said than done. On the other hand their “great joy” is over the news of Jesus’ resurrection. They know this is Good News, in fact, the best news.

God didn’t just try to ignore or overlook our sin. If he had, we would all be lost, for God’s Word says nothing that is impure gets into the kingdom of heaven (Rev. 21:27). That counts me out, probably you too. So instead of ignoring our sin God deals with it head on and pays the price for it himself. “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us” (2 Cor. 5:21). That’s the one that was punished in our place, and that’s the one who is risen from the dead.

Because Jesus is risen from the dead, we know he really is the Son of God. Romans 1, “He was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead.” Because Jesus is risen from the dead, we know his teaching is truth. “Destroy this temple” Jesus had said

earlier, “and I will raise it again in three days” (Jn. 2:19). Because Jesus is risen we know that we too will rise to eternal life. Jesus promised, “Because I live, you also will live” (Jn. 14:19).

Because Jesus is risen, we need not think God is peeved at us for our sin, just waiting for the best opportunity to wipe us out. Instead, he has already exhausted his wrath on the Lamb of God who takes away our sin. He did that out of love for us. “God so loved the world that he sent his Son” (Jn. 3:16). He desires only to forgive and save us from sin and death’s tyranny. *As he said*, “In my Father’s house are many rooms. I am going there to prepare a place for you” (Jn. 14:2). Because Jesus is risen from the dead, we need not have a dread fear of death, because, *as he said*, “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved” (Mk. 16:16).

So Easter isn’t just an important day to observe at church. It is a truth worth celebrating in our lives. It should inform our views of life, of who put us here and why. And it should inform our views of death. This isn’t just about one man cheating death. It’s about the Son of God defeating death *for us*.

When we left them the two women were filled with fear and great joy and were running to tell his disciples. Verse 9, “And behold, Jesus met them and said, ‘Greetings.’ And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him.” Notice, Jesus is no ghost. They’re holding on to his feet and, as far as I know, there’s no part of a ghost that you can hold on to. That’s what makes them ghosts. And notice also they bowed down and worshiped him. That’s a verb the disciples hadn’t done yet. They were *amazed* by him. They *feared* him. But they had not yet worshiped him. These women, holding on to the feet of the one who was crucified but is now risen . . . they have no more reservations or doubts. They worshiped him.

As the angel did, Jesus also says to them, “Do not be afraid.” He doesn’t want even a trace of fear or uneasiness. His resurrection means he has won salvation for us, and that’s not something to fear, but to celebrate.

Finally, Jesus repeats the same assignment to the women that the angel had given them. “Go and tell” are the verbs he gives them. Not “sit and speculate.” Not “sit and hope to be entertained by this year’s Easter service, or that it doesn’t take too long.” Not, “unlock the church doors and hope people will come”. No. “Go and tell” is the assignment. It starts with family. If we aren’t sharing the true joy of the faith with our kids, for example, then we’ve neglected our highest calling as parents. We’ve abdicated to others who will fill our kids with *something*, who knows what, but something.

Jesus said, “Go and tell my brothers . . .” There is great grace in both those words “my brothers”. Remember, those disciples had failed him in spectacular form. When the pressure was on, they ran like scared rabbits, even though they had all promised a few hours before never to deny or abandon him (26:31-32). Yet, in spite of all the ways they failed him, in spite of everything, he still calls them, “my brothers.” There’s grace in those words. They contain love and forgiveness. Imagine: The Son of God has become so much as one of us that he thinks himself our brother. Luther wrote, “If, now, Christ is our brother, I should like to know what we still lack?” If Christ is our brother, that means we share the same loving Father, and the same inheritance. And that inheritance is being raised up ourselves and brought to heaven. That’s why Paul calls Jesus “the firstfruits” of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20).

Because Christ is our brother, in the end, we have nothing to fear. Sure, there will still be trials and challenges, there will still be suffering and death, but God will see us through those things and eventually bring us home. Paul wrote, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18). And that’s all we really need, isn’t it? Not a fix to all our temporary challenges, but a fix to the big problems of sin and eternal death and the devil. And in Christ, that’s what God has done for us. He has conquered those enemies for us. He is risen, as he said. Amen.

Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!** Amen.

