

John 20.1-18  
Dies festa resurrectionis Domini  
16 April 2017  
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

+ Hallelujah! +

Hallelujah! Christ is risen!  
**He is risen indeed. Hallelujah!**

Beloved in the Lord: grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

*Exordium*

Dead body? Check.

Grave? Check.

Grave clothes wrapped tightly? Check.

Burial spices? No. We'll wait till Sunday.

Massive stone cut to fit the grave opening? Check.

Mortar to seal it? Check.

Guards to guard it? Check.

Christ Jesus indeed lay in death's strong bands. The Son of God. Stone cold dead on a stone cold slab hewn out of a rock. The would-be Victor now the Victim. The dead body, the grave, the stone, the mortar now the proof in the pudding that the devil was onto something when he taunted the Lord Jesus right after His Baptism: "If You truly are the Son of God...." Do you—can you—actually die if you are in fact the Son of God?

Yes. Yes. Yes.

Yes, if you're the kind of Son of God that this one is. Who takes on human flesh to suffer and die in the place of His sinful creatures. Yes, if you're the kind of Son of God whose Father so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son. Yes, if you're the kind of Son of God who came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life, a ransom for many.

But not the mortar, not the boulder, not the cave and the grave, not the guards, not the coldness of death, not even death itself. And certainly not the fury of hell and its prince, the devil, could hold Him. We sing "Christ Jesus *lay* in death strong bands" for a reason. Past tense. For Christ is arisen. **He is risen indeed. Hallelujah!**

And the witness of history proves it. Mary Magdelene was the first to see the empty tomb. No body there. Then Peter, who had been outstripped by John. Then John Himself, who wrote the words of the Gospel for today. No body in sight. Gone. Just grave clothes lying there empty—as if what was in them had left like air leaves a hot air balloon. As indeed it happened. And a face cloth. As if care had been

taken to remove it. As indeed it happened. And the testimony of the Old Testament Scriptures that the Messiah would reign forever. And then Mary's visit with the "Gardener." And then the 40 days after it all during which the disciples spoke and ate with the Lord Jesus and touched Him. And the 500 to whom the Lord Jesus appeared after His resurrection. And finally, and most tellingly, even the witness of the Jewish leaders who paid off the guards to say His body had been stolen. Why in the world would they ever concoct such a thing if it weren't in fact that Christ had risen.

Therefore, fellow-redeemed, let us keep this feast in sincerity and truth. For Christ is risen. **He is risen indeed. Hallelujah!**

We join together in singing our Exordium hymn, "He Is Arisen! Glorious Word," hymn 488. Please rise.

The words to which we turn our attention this morning are these words of Jesus spoken to Mary in the Gospel: "Go to My brothers." *Oremus: haec, pater sancte, verba tua sunt, etc.*

What ended on Good Friday evening in the cold grave hadn't begun any more auspiciously for Jesus. He had gone to the garden to pray. In the moment of greatest agony. And as He went off on His own, He had commanded His own disciples: "You pray, too." But when He arose from prayer and went to His disciples, all He saw was 11 men crumpled up in balls on the ground. Fast asleep.

And then the troops approached. Peter stepped up with all His bravado, with all his faithless misunderstanding, with all his penchant for standing in the way of the Lord's works and ways. And he sliced off the ear of Malchus. Only to receive—once again, poor Peter—the sharp rebuke of Jesus.

Then the arrest.

And as their Rabbi and Leader and Teacher and King was led off captive, the 11 fled. And abandoned Jesus once again in the throes of His agony.

But curiosity got the cat. Peter and John followed Him to the high-priest's house. And there, Peter denied the Lord Jesus. To the face of a little girl. Only to receive Jesus' sharpest rebuke yet. A rebuke without words. Nothing but a silent glance.

Fellow-redeemed: we call Peter and the rest of the 11 and Mary of Magdala and the other Marys "saints" not for their victory over their own sins, but in spite of their sins. And if ever there was a series of events that proved what Paul said, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, this one's it.

And that's why Jesus does what He does now. He calls them "brothers." He calls them brothers not for how they've treated Him. Not for their perfidy. Not for their sins. But in spite of their sins. And speaks into their ears a word of pure Gospel. He calls them "brothers." Because this is what the suffering and death of Jesus means. This is what His resurrection from the dead means. This is what His victory over sin and death means. This is what His harrowing of hell means, His victory lap around the kingdom of Satan. It means that He makes common cause with sinners and becomes their Friend and Brother. Not by telling them to try harder. But by forgiving them. And restoring them. His death wasn't for Him. It was for them. His resurrection wasn't for Him, for He had no need to die in the first place. It was for them, because for their sin they needed to die. His descent into hell wasn't for Himself, for He was already Lord of all. It was for them, who were captives of the kingdom of Satan.

Just as it was for *you*.

And this is the fruit of the resurrection. The thing that comes from it. Jesus calls you, too, "brothers."

\*\*\*\*\*

When I was growing up we lived in Omaha for about three years, in about the toniest neighborhood in Omaha there is. Our house, of course, was the little one. My mom and dad had just gotten very fortunate to be able to buy that modest but nice place. Location, location, location. And down the street from me lived my friend John. John's mom and dad were so wealthy they had a live-in butler, a live-in maid, and a live-in nanny. They drove Cadillacs. They had a swimming pool. A yard that seemed like it took up a whole city block, with places to dig holes in the woods and build forts. And a house that went on forever. Really, it was a mansion. And I dreamt.

I dreamt that one day I'd wake up to discover that the "poor Brusses" were long-lost relatives of John. That I was even his brother.

And the reason's obvious. If I were John's brother, then whatever John had would be mine. A room in his mansion. Waking up in the morning and just running out into the yard to dig holes in the woods and jump in the pool. Whenever I wanted to. Frank the butler to clean up all my toys. The maid to whip up a hot fudge shake whenever I wanted one. A cool nanny paid to play with me whenever I got bored with my brother Bill. Or even my "long-lost brother, John." If only I were John's brother.

\*\*\*\*

But here Christ actually calls His disciples "brothers." So that this is how you are to know Jesus: as your Brother.

If you think it would've been a big deal for me to have turned out to be the brother of my friend John in Omaha, that utterly pales in comparison to being and being called the brother of Jesus. Because that One who calls me "brother" is Lord over heaven and earth, over sin and hell, over the devil and death. And if Jesus calls me brother, then I'm an heir with Him of all His possessions. My sins? Gone. Because Christ gives me His righteousness. My guilty conscience? Done away with. Because my conscience is cleansed by the blood of Christ. My death? Swallowed up in victory. Because Christ is risen from the dead. My hell? Over. Because Christ has stormed and assaulted its gates. The city of the devil is fallen. And I'm an heir with Christ of heaven and everlasting life.

And this precisely is the joy of Easter. The joy of Easter is that the One who's victorious from the grave over sin, death, and hell calls you, too, "brothers."

Now, to be sure, that word, "brother," pertains to believers in Christ. But unbelievers and the ungrateful? Those who are secure in their sins and quite happy with them, thank you? Those who'd rather tune out this morning than hear that Christ is and wants to be their Brother? Those who in their intellectual pride can't and won't and refuse to acknowledge that the Son of God rose from the dead—Why, that word doesn't belong to those folks. Because like all Gospel words that word is a jewel and a pearl. The adornment of the Christian heart. Christ calls you "brother"! But Christ also says that a jewel and pearl like that isn't to be cast before swine [Mt 7.6].

How very unlike Mary, who first heard that word and took it to heart. She'd come to the cemetery that morning looking for nothing but...Jesus. She's so focused on Jesus that she's not even startled by the two angels. She doesn't say, "Whoa! Hey! Angels! What are you guys doing here?" Instead she continues to look. She has one thing in mind and one thing only: Jesus. And she won't rest until she has Him. Because without Him she's got nothing. But with Him she's got everything. And she knows it by experience—just like you, from your Baptism. The poor woman had been possessed by seven demons,

and the Lord Jesus cast them out of her. Jesus, her Life. Jesus, her Lord. Jesus, her Savior. Jesus, her everything.

How many demons has the Lord saved you from in your Baptism—the demon of unbelief and mistrust and distrust and hatred of the God who created you?

But now Peter and the rest are beset by their own epic poem of evils. Peter shamefully denied the Lord and did everything in his power to thwart His salvation. And the rest? Why, they didn't fare much better. They fell asleep. And then they ran away in the hour when Jesus didn't need a brother, but just a friend. They've turned themselves into perfidious, perjured, double-dealing, disloyal reprobates. They've sinned against the God and Lord of heaven and earth. And they're mired in a bad conscience. Dripping with guilt. Guilt over what they did and shouldn't have. Guilt over what they didn't but could've.

JUST LIKE YOU.

"Whatever you've done to the least of these," Jesus says, "you've done to Me." Whatever. Good *and* evil. We often think of that verse having to do with our *good* works. But it also deals with our dead works. With our betrayals, slander, hurt and harm. With our angry actions motivated by fear and not love. With our selfish ambition that treads everyone else into the dirt, never mind our failures to do the good that our vocation lays upon us. Sins that are—yes, of course—against neighbor. But also against Jesus Himself. So that we can't climb into bed or get out of it in the morning—even on Easter—without a nagging conscience that says, "You deserve nothing but hell both now and later."

That's how the disciples felt, too.

But Jesus'll hear nothing of it. Instead, He calls them "brothers." He points to the empty tomb where He once lay and says, "All your sin and guilt lies there. Dead. For I bore it in your place. And now I call you brothers. And everything that I have is yours. My righteousness? Yours. My resurrection from the dead? Yours on the Last Day. My everlasting life? Yours. My heaven? Yours."

And that's exactly how Jesus wants to speak to you, too. He wants to call you His brothers and sisters. He wants to speak those words to *you*.

And He wants to find faith in the heart. Faith that trusts in Him alone for every good both on earth and in heaven. He wants those words to create another Mary inside every one of you. A Mary that seeks nothing but Jesus. A Mary that won't rest until it captures Jesus in His own words: "I forgive you all yours sins." A Mary that won't rest until it finds Jesus wrapped around you in your Baptism. A Mary that won't stop coming and coming and coming again...if only to touch and to hold and to have Jesus in the blessed Sacrament of His Body and Blood.

May God the Holy Spirit create such faith in the hearts of all of you. The faith of Mary. The faith that simply won't relent...until it has Jesus. God grant it to you all for Christ's sake. Amen.

Hallelujah! Christ is risen!  
**He is risen indeed. Hallelujah!**

*pax dei, etc.*

*sdg*  
*jsb*