

The Vigil of Easter  
March 31, 2018  
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church

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Mark 16:1-8  
Topeka, KS

Alleluia! Christ is risen!  
He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

With whom can you identify in Mark's Easter Gospel? What about Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome? Just a little more than 24 hours ago, they were standing in mid-day darkness, looking on from a distance at the horror of the cross.

What injustice, or death of a loved one, or other tragedy has darkened your world? When was the last time you were pushed toward hopelessness, your faith in God's loving kindness severely tested by sorrow and suffering, struggling to reconcile what the Lord says to you in Scripture with the tragedy that was enveloping you, desperate to bring dignity to what feels like a humiliating defeat? With the Marys and Salome we too have our dark nights of the soul—grieving and mourning, crying and trying to make the best of a life filled with crosses.

Now the Sabbath has passed. It's after sundown on Saturday. The aromatic spices for anointing Jesus' body have been purchased in the hours since sundown. (Did you smell them as you walked into church tonight?) And very early, on this first day of the week as the Judeans keep time, we are the first among our fellow disciples to experience this deliverance of God—greater than the exodus from Egypt, or those other miracles we heard about in tonight's readings... this deliverance of God whose evidence will be seen by all the disciples when the sun has risen.

And then... it all happens so fast! Rapid fire sights and sounds that rock our world and powerfully address our sadness and grief. A massive stone rolled aside—a stone we knew we were too weak to move. A man dressed in a white robe—surely an angel!—saying amazing things to us.

“Jesus you seek, the Nazarene, the One who IS crucified. HE IS RISEN!”

Notice first exactly what this messenger of God says about the crucified Christ. Not that He's “the One who *was* crucified,” but that He's “the One who *is* crucified.” (The perfect tense, in Greek.) We haven't left Good Friday behind to move on to more glorious things. Jesus remains the crucified One who appeared to His disciples on the evening of this same day with the very real wounds of His crucifixion, and did so again eight days hence. Jesus remains the crucified One. And this is why, years later, when St. Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians, he could say (and we still with him), that “*We preach Christ crucified!*” Again, the perfect tense. Still today, the crucified One! Crucified to pay the full price for your sins, as we heard so powerfully last night.

But not only is Jesus the crucified One. HE IS RISEN! And that especially is the good news of this Easter day that began at sunset. Jesus is RISEN from the death He suffered by crucifixion. He is RISEN from death and the grave, which are the wages of sin. He is RISEN from death, which can seem so final to us. He, who during His ministry demonstrated His power over death in the lives of others, now exercises His supreme authority over Satan's seeming stranglehold in His own life. HE IS RISEN! The tomb cannot hold him! A one-ton stone couldn't keep Him in. The death that Satan tries to convince us is permanent, is just a three-day sleep for Jesus.

And how beautiful it is, in this Gospel of Mark, that these two concepts—which in Greek are only a single word each... these two truths—that Jesus is and remains the crucified One, and that HE IS RISEN... these two words are side-by-side in Mark's Easter Gospel. One after another. Both are true simultaneously and forever. And that makes all the difference in the world for you!

This is important, you see, because, in addition to identifying with the two Marys and Salome, we also can identify with the sinner Peter, can't we? Peter, who just over two days ago denied His Lord three times, and then broke down and wept in grief and shame over what he had done. Maybe it isn't outright denial of Jesus as Lord to save your life, with a knife-wielding ISIS fighter standing over you, but what other sins have left you with grief and shame over what you have done to your Lord?

Yet now, in the first verbal proclamation of Jesus' resurrection, the man dressed in white says to the women, *"Go, tell His disciples and Peter that He is going before you into Galilee."* He singles Peter out to be told the good news of the resurrection—that the One who was and remains crucified for all Peter's sins has now risen from the death He suffered for sin, thereby demonstrating that all His work—even the seeming defeat of the cross—is all the authoritative working of God for the salvation of sinners—for Peter and the other disciples, for you and for me.

*"But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you."* Just as He told you on the Mount of Olives, on Maundy Thursday, when He said, *"But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee."*<sup>1</sup> You had His Word of promise all along. And now, with His resurrection, you are seeing—and you will see in Galilee—what could be seen with the eyes of faith all along. Seeing follows upon believing. Christ's resurrection has been a sure thing all along.

And so also for you, dear brothers and sisters in Christ! He will see you too, in the heavenly Galilee, just as He told you! *"I am the resurrection and the life [Jesus said]. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live!"*

May you and I—grieving and repenting of our sin as did Peter, and worshipping our Lord as did these women... May you and I always, in every circumstance of life, listen to and believe the Word of Jesus who is and remains crucified for your sins... yet IS RISEN, so that you too, through your own crosses, and because of His cross, will see Him again in the resurrection of all flesh... just as He told you!

In the Name of our risen Savior!

Amen.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 14:28