

Mark 16.1-8
Feast of the Resurrection of Our Lord
21 April 2019
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

+ Hallelujah! +

Exordium

Hallelujah! Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed! Hallelujah!

Satan thought he had it all won. He'd been taunting the Lord Christ from the start. "If you are the Son of God... Then turn these stones into bread. Throw Yourself down from the temple. Bow down and worship me—nothing'll happen to you. In fact, You'll get the whole world."

And then the Lord Christ's cry of dereliction from the cross to the heavenly Father: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

To every appearance, as He breathed out His last, it seemed the end to God's plan—τετέλεσται; It is finished!—and the dawn of a new age. An age of darkness. Unremitting sin. Death. Hell.

But in this Satan was deluding not only the world. But even Himself.

For, just as the Scriptures of the Old Testament had declared, after three days in the grave—count them: Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter Sunday morning—the Son of Man and the Son of God harrowed hell and rose in triumph. Just as Job himself had said, "I know that My Redemer lives." And because He lives, so will Job. And so will you.

Hallelujah! Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed! Hallelujah!

We rise to join in our Exordium hymn, hymn 488.

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

What are you looking for today? What do you expect to get out of all this—this service, this day?

For some of you, no doubt, it's a return to church after a long absence. Praise and thanks be to God that you're here!

For others of you're reliving childhood memories. Catching up with cousins you've not long seen. Trying to recapture some of that "magic" from when you were a kid.

Or maybe you're here to mark the change of the seasons—this day right at the backdoor threshold of a winter that never seemed to end and now...the promise of spring. Death and life. Bright skies. Warmer weather. Shorts and t-shirts. Sun burn on your forehead.

No doubt some of you are here today to meet no expectation *you* have. You expected nothing of today. It's just that today others had expectations of you. The once-a-year event when mom gets to have all the kids and grandkids in church at the same time.

Or maybe—maybe it's all a lot fuzzier than that. You're just looking for a pick-me-up, as if that's the purpose of this building, this service, this music, your snazzy clothes and everyone else's: to lift your spirits.

If that's what you came for, you'll be sorely disappointed. Memories fade. Spring lasts but a few weeks. Mom won't always be pleased with you. And, finally, your emotions are a fickle thing. What gives pleasure today won't give pleasure tomorrow, and the highs are always followed by the lows.

I can't help you with that. With any of that.

But thanks be to God! For I have something far greater. Far better. Far more stable. Far more enduring. Something that time cannot make fade into the mists of childhood. Something that can never disappoint. Something that's yours whether felt or not. Something whose truth cannot be falsified.

And it's this: you have a Savior from sin and death. Death's stinger, sin, hasn't just been dulled, it's been removed. For Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures. He was buried. And He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures (see 1 Cor 15.3-4).

The Marys—they had their own expectations of this day.

When they went out that first Easter morning...well, they didn't really expect it to be the first Easter morning.

They left home as soon as they woke up to try to get to the market early and buy their burial spices. They had important work to do. Their friend and rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth, was dead.

And they knew this not by report. For they had been there. They were eyewitnesses to His horrifying crucifixion—they heard the hammer blows and screams of pain as the nails were driven into His wrists and feet. They heard the jeering of the crowds. They saw the mocking placard: Jesus of Nazareth: King of the Jews. Right at the top of His cross. Because this is what happens when you cross Caesar. You die. They saw Him breathe His last. They heard His cry, It is finished. They were close enough to feel the ground shake ever so slightly as the water and blood poured from His pierced side. They saw Joseph of Arimathea—that good man—take the body of Jesus for burial. They followed him and Nicodemus, with the body, to the grave. And they watched as stone and seal were placed over the mouth.

No, for the Marys, today was no Easter. It was just finishing up what they had barely even been able to start—the final disposition of the bodily remains of Jesus of Nazareth.

So you can only imagine their chagrin at themselves as they approached where they had last left Jesus, ointments and spices for burial spilling out of their arms, only to realize just before they got there that they'd been complete fools. They didn't have anyone to break the seal and remove the stone. That's how certain they were that this was not—absolutely not—the first Easter. They'd come looking for their dead friend. They'd come expecting to mourn their lost friend. But now, they discovered, they'd messed it all up.

But not like Jesus had.

Of course, it wasn't really Jesus' fault that He had messed it all up. He'd told them already fully three times what was to happen. He was to be handed over to the authorities. Crucified. And on the third day He was to rise. Three times He said it. No ambiguity. No figurative language. Nothing cryptic. Or in a different language. Just plain English...or Aramaic.

He'd told them. But they just didn't get it.

And they didn't get it because it just didn't compute. They knew their Bible. Through Adam's sin and Eve, sin had entered the world. And death followed. And they knew what it was like to be sinners. How, try as they might, they simply could not perfectly love and trust in God. How, try as they might, their mind wandered on the Sabbath as the Scriptures were being read in the synagogue. How they couldn't help but hating the Roman authorities—far cry from honoring them, serving and obeying them, loving and cherishing them. How even if they'd never wielded knife or club against anyone they just couldn't stop the hatred in their hearts—or their lust. And how their tongues—oh, their tongues—how they could never be tamed. Just like their hearts that were never satisfied with what the Lord had actually given them.

You know what I'm talking about right?

The Marys were sinners. The wages of sin is death. They were gonna die. They knew it. Their friend and rabbi Jesus *had* died. That they had seen. And death just isn't something you bounce back from.

You get their thinking.

But Jesus' death was a death unlike any other. It was the only Holy One, the very Son of God, dying for sinners. A perfect Substitute. The perfect, full payment for all sin. Not His own, but your sin and mine. The sin of the world, in fact. And with sin paid, defeated, buried, conquered—death could no longer hold Him.

Just as it cannot hold you. Just as it cannot hold the Marys.

And that's exactly what they found out. The Marys showed up for the first Easter not expecting an Easter but the continuation of Jesus' funeral service. What they got instead was the proclamation of the Gospel: "You are seeking Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified for your sins. Not His own. Yours. And now sin and death have been defeated. That's why He's not here. He is risen from the dead. And you, too, shall rise."

And with that we come to one last point, and it's this. The Marys came with false expectations of what they would find and do because their expectations were based on...well, sight and memory and smell—probably even their emotions. The sights, memories, smells, and emotions of Good Friday. And using those tools of theirs they got it all wrong. They missed it. They entirely failed to see and know and therefore trust what Jesus was doing—defeating sin and therefore also defeating death. For them!

And you can imagine how their confusion must have continued. They arrived at the grave expecting it to be sealed. It was open. What's this?

They'd spent the equivalent of a small fortune to anoint Jesus' dead body. But all they saw were empty grave clothes. What's this?

They peered inside expecting to see the dead body of Jesus. All they saw was a young man. What's this?

What's going on?

They had no idea.

Until, that is, the young man opened his mouth and spoke to them. And filled their sense of *hearing*.
With the Gospel.

And then it was like the scales fell off their eyes. They were sinners, to be sure. But in Christ they had one who forgives sins. They were death- and grave-bound, no doubt about it. But in Christ they had death's victor. They already had one foot in hell. But in Christ they had hell's harrower, who had descended there to proclaim His victory over sin, death, and Satan himself.

"He is not here!" That was the message of the young man.

And that's the same word that is proclaimed to you this morning.

I don't know what your expectations were in coming this morning. But if they weren't to find an empty grave and a Divine Victor over sin, death, and the devil, you came with the wrong expectations.

So let me set it straight: Jesus Christ, who was crucified, is no longer dead. He is risen from the dead. And today what He gives you today is what He gave the Marys some two thousand years ago: the forgiveness of all your sins and the promise of your own resurrection to everlasting life.

The Lord keep you in that faith to life everlasting.

Amen.

pax dei, etc.

jsb
sdg