

Mark 16.1–8
The Feast of the Resurrection of Our Lord
17 April 2022
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

+ Hallelujah! +

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

Easter has become one of the great holidays of our country—secular holidays, that is. And with that, the empty tomb of Jesus has become just that—a vacuum left to be filled; a blank canvas to paint whatever we want on it. Opinion ranges, but it always reduces Easter. Easter's a symbol of newness. A sort of pagan Springtime festival that celebrates the life hidden plants. Or a myth about good coming out of bad.

Even those who call themselves Christians reduce Easter. According to one theologian, get this, Easter is about the possibility—the possibility!—that even when we die there might be something known as god. According to others, it's a myth about spiritual rebirth. Yet others, against the very words of Job, who declares, “yet in *my flesh* I shall see God,” think they save the whole business of resurrection by making it just a spiritual thing: the escape of the soul from its prison the body.

None of these notions accord with what the Holy Scriptures say.

So let's us purge the old leaven and leave such sorry talk behind and celebrate this Feast today with the unleavened bread of the sincerity and truth of God's holy Word.

We join in our exordium hymn, hymn 488, “He Is Arisen, Glorious Word!”

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

So just what does the resurrection mean?

First, let's be clear about something: whatever the resurrection *means*, it means that only because the resurrection is true. It means it only because Jesus was physically raised from death and the tomb by the power of the Father.

It means what it means only because of the fact that: Mary Magdalene, Mary the wife of James, and Salome really went to Jesus' tomb expecting to embalm Him. The fact that the stone three grown women couldn't move had really been moved. That the physical shroud that wrapped the physical body of Jesus lay physically crumpled in the tomb, the face-cloth nicely folded. That young man, an angel, a messenger from God Himself speaking God's Word, not his own, really sat in the tomb of Jesus and really announced, “You are seeking Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. He's risen. He's not here. Behold the place where they laid Him.” Whatever the resurrection *means*, it *means* only because the resurrection of Jesus *really happened*. Fact, fact, fact, fact.

Paul says the same thing but backwards. He says, “If Christ isn't risen, empty is our preaching and empty is your faith....If Christ isn't risen, then vain is your faith, you're still in your sins, and then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, of all men we are to be the most pitied.”

But, fellow-redeemed, your faith isn't vain; nor is our preaching empty.

Rather, on the rock of Jesus' tomb, God has once for all inscribed the fulfillment of Job's hope who says, "O that with an iron pen and lead my words were engraved the rock forever: 'I know that My Redeemer lives and at the last He will stand upon the earth!'"

But maybe the words of that Old Testament saint aren't good enough for you.

But if you argue with Job? Then your quarrel is with with the Marys and Salome.

If they don't suffice then you have to contend with the stone that couldn't be moved by 3 grown women—but was!

If that's still not good enough, you'll have to argue with the shroud. If with the shroud, then you have to answer the messenger of God who said, "He is risen." And if you argue with the angel, then your issue's going to be with the very Word of God, with the four Gospels, with Peter, with Paul.

Because singing "Christ the Lord Is Ris'n Today" isn't code for anything except for what it says, "Christ is risen. He is risen from the dead. He is risen indeed." Hallelujah and fact.

Whatever the resurrection *means*, it *means it* because the resurrection of our Lord Jesus happened. Sundered soul has been rejoined to His body. That body, cold as the earth itself in death is now warm with life. And the grave that held Him in holds Him no longer.

So then what exactly *does* the resurrection mean? One thing it doesn't mean is that the cross is no longer necessary. Because cross and grave go hand-in-hand.

Jesus' physical resurrection from the dead confirms His incarnation. It confirms the fact

that God took on human flesh to redeem sinners.

That the One who rose from the dead was the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us.

That the God-Man Jesus

who just days before had sweated drops of blood in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Whose Father wouldn't take the cup from Him.

It confirms the fact that it wasn't a Christ who had forgotten the pain of the cross that was raised from the dead, a mere spirit without physical feeling,

but the very Christ whose hands and feet were pierced by nails,

whose side was rent by the point of a spear,

who later said to Thomas, "Stick your finger in My hands and stick your hand in my side."

And who even today at the throne of His Father pleads the case of sinners by the wounds that won their redemption.

And that's scandalous. It just doesn't go with the modern, commercialized Easter-Jesus of popular imagination that comes along with a wicker basket filled with pastel plastic grass and emblazoned with an empty cross.

But then again, the empty tomb isn't for us to fill with meaning. It's for God to fill.

And He does. Through the mouth of the young man, He assures us that the empty tomb is the empty tomb of "Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. And dead. And buried." You see, the empty grave doesn't annul the cross; it confirms it. And in confirming the cross Christ's resurrection answers the big questions.

Was Jesus' death really what He claimed it would be, the defeat of death? Yes. Look no further than the empty tomb.

Was Jesus' death rendered to His Father as payment for the sins of the world valid in His Father's eyes? Yes. Look no further than the empty tomb. For there God the Father has crowned with life the One who has paid the full debt of the Law by His death.

Could it be that Satan, who by a tree mortally wounded Adam and all his descendants, could it be that by the tree of the Cross he was himself overcome? Yes indeed. For even in His three-day rest in the tomb the Lord Christ harrowed hell itself and proclaimed victory to the spirits held there in chains. Even the gates of hell cannot prevail against the kingdom of the Son of God, His church.

Fellow redeemed, that's all true.

But how do we know this applies to us? How do we know that we,
who have committed so many sins.

Whose very living and breathing is soiled with sin.

Who, though redeemed, so often live as the unredeemed—

—How do we know that what the empty tomb means applies to us—to you?

That Christ's resurrection is, as you heard on Maundy Thursday, "for you"?

You know it the same way you know anything else about how God is minded toward you.

Through His Word.

The risen Christ, who has conquered sin, death, and the devil doesn't wait until we call on Him, until we clean up our lips and hands and minds and get straight, He takes the initiative and He comes to us in His Word and He calls us brothers. The young man says to the women, "Go and tell His disciples! He's going before them to Galilee; they'll see Him there." In the Gospel according to St. John, Jesus Himself says, "Go to My brothers and tell them!" My brothers.

He's telling Peter and all the rest, telling you and me: "You betrayed Me. In My darkest hour, you left Me. You fell asleep while I sweated drops of blood. You, Peter, denied Me before little girls! I stumbled under the weight of the world's sin. It wasn't *you* who stepped in to help, but a stranger! But I've paid for this, too, Peter and all the rest. And I call you brothers. There's no sin you can commit. No sin you have committed. No sin so great, that I've not also paid for it by My death. And the Father has accepted this payment. He's raised Me from the dead to tell you this. And now through My Word I come to you, Peter, and all the rest, and I tell you what My resurrection means: Just as I was delivered up on account of your trespasses, so am I raised on account of your justification. You have been set right with God. And I call you brothers."

God's first Word to the world on the morning of Jesus' resurrection is pure Gospel. Because the enmity between God and men had been put to death in Christ's crucifixion. And that, fellow-redeemed, is what Jesus' *real* resurrection *really* means—for Peter, for the remaining 10, for the Marys and Salome, for you, for me.

And what comfort this preaching comes with. Because you know you're not better than Peter. At the drop of a hat, Jesus becomes a major inconvenience for you. How easily you crumble under the weight of temptation! And in the dark night of sin, as black as the night when Jesus was beaten by Caiaphas and denied by Peter, you become so wrapped up in your own that you don't—you can't—recognize the hell you've sunken into until the cock God's Law crows and calls you out.

That's why those two words are so important: "My brothers." Because those two words mean that He opposes His death and His resurrection to your sin, your hell, your condemnation. They mean that He takes on Himself what you deserve and gives you what you don't. They mean that He's worn your flesh. Suffered *your* punishment for sin; and in that flesh that still bears the holes and the gash, He rises from the grave and points to it and says to you, "This is what I've won for you: I've canceled your debt of sin to the Father. And if I've taken away your sin, I've taken away your death. And if in My flesh—your flesh—I am raised from the grave, so will you be."

That's Christ's first preaching after His resurrection, a beautiful summary of all His preaching: you are His brothers. He has gone before you. Where He has gone through the grave, so will you; where He has been raised to imperishable life, so will you. The objective truth of that fact cannot be erased.

And thanks be to God. Because then that means your Baptism is really what Christ says it is: your participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus. For the forgiveness of sins!

Then it means that at the altar you really do receive the crucified and risen Holy Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus. For the forgiveness of sins!

Then it means that this pulpit is occupied by a man whom Christ really called—like the young man—to proclaim Christ's resurrection to you. To call you His brothers. And seal to you *your* victory in Him over death in His resurrection from the dead.

Indeed, if Christ is not raised from the dead, then we, then you, are the most miserable of men.

But if He is raised from the dead—and He is—then in this life and the next we have every good: the forgiveness of sins, salvation, and life everlasting.

That, fellow-redeemed—that and nothing more, that and nothing less—is what the resurrection means. Amen.

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

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