

Easter Day  
Text: Mark 16:1-8  
Trinity Lutheran, Worden, IL & Zion Lutheran, Carpenter, IL  
Pastor H. R. Curtis

✠Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ ✠

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The women who followed Jesus were no fools. They were faithful and loving.

They were down to earth women – the sort who made sure things got taken care of. For it was they who cared for the earthly needs of Jesus and his disciples. And now, once again, they are taking care of business. They had seen with their own eyes what happened to Jesus. They had witnessed the nails and the spear and the crown of thorns. They had seen him die and they watched as Joseph of Arimathea laid him in his new tomb. And now they come to that tomb at the earliest possible moment to take care of the unfortunate business of washing the body of Jesus and seeing that he receives a proper burial – what happened on Friday had been too slapdash for them; so they are here to see to it that things are done right.

How foolish these prudent women are! How faithless they are in their faithfulness! How slow to believe the Word of Christ instead of their own eyes! For before they stood at the foot of the cross on Good Friday, they stood outside the tomb of Lazarus when Jesus called him forth. They had heard him say that He IS the resurrection and the life. And yet they look for him in a grave! The promise of Christ to rise again has been driven from their hearts by the vision of Christ dead on the cross.

And is their story not yours? Despite all the goodness you have received from the Lord, do you not waver and doubt? Do you not hedge your bets with God – always ready with a backup plan just in case the Lord fails you? Do you not feel the tug of what your eyes see trying to drag you away from the promise of Christ? You see a loved one sick and dying and you are fixated on it, convincing yourself that it is final, that this is the end of the story. You watch your own body slope downward toward the grave and you are frightened by the black nothingness that awaits.

Repent. Learn from these women standing at the mouth of an empty tomb that there is a better fear that means rejoicing. For behold: Christ the crucified is not dead, but alive. And not alive in some smarmy Hallmark greeting card sense. He is not just alive in our memories or in our hearts. To hell with that kind of talk, for that kind of talk is the opposite of our heavenly hope in Christ. As a poet has said,

“Make no mistake: if He rose at all  
it was as His body;  
if the cells' dissolution did not reverse, the molecules  
reknit, the amino acids rekindle,  
the Church will fall.

It was not as the flowers,  
each soft Spring recurrent;  
it was not as His Spirit in the mouths and fuddled  
eyes of the eleven apostles;  
it was as His flesh: ours.

The same hinged thumbs and toes,  
the same valved heart  
that--pierced--died, withered, paused, and then  
regathered out of enduring Might  
new strength to enclose.

Let us not mock God with metaphor,

analogy, sidestepping, transcendence;  
 making of the event a parable, a sign painted in the  
 faded credulity of earlier ages:  
 let us walk through the door.

The stone is rolled back, not papier-mâché,  
 not a stone in a story,  
 but the vast rock of materiality that in the slow  
 grinding of time will eclipse for each of us  
 the wide light of day.” From John Updike's *Seven Stanzas at Easter*.

So rejoice Christian - Christ is alive in the fullest and realest sense. The tomb is empty. And he is risen to give you life. For he died for you and now he is risen for you. Forget your faithlessness and your sins. Lose them in the glorious wounds of the Resurrected Christ. For his cross spells the end of all your sin – he died there in your place. He took into his own body all the sin that ever there was – even the sin only you know about and are ashamed of. Be ashamed no more, for your shame and guilt were borne by him. God made Jesus, him who knew no sin, to become sin for us. The power of sin and death was spent on him. They have no power left. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because now all the condemnation has been spent on him who was crucified. And now behold, He lives! His sacrifice is accepted by the Father and Death is shattered in his victory.

And, dear Christian, this victory is your victory. For the Resurrection of Jesus is not just what happened way back then, it is what happens now, to you. Listen to St. Paul, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup> We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order

that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. <sup>5</sup> For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” What glory this is: for you are baptized. This Resurrection promise is for you. Christ has already died the big Death, the Death that ends in hell and goes on forever. Big Death is dead. Now all that remains is the little death, which God now calls but a sleep, a rest with Christ. For Life lives. And he will bring this life to you and your loved ones in Christ as well.

And again, it is not some Hallmark hogwash I'm talking about, but a real Resurrection. Though you saw her lowered into the grave with your own eyes, you will throw real arms around Grandma again. Though you held the hand of your beloved as you felt the life depart, you will stand on real feet side by side with your spouse again in the kingdom of God. Though your heart was crushed beyond despair by the loss of your child, that is not the end. Christ will raise your child bodily along with all his Christian children and usher us all into everlasting life.

Yes, friends, the Resurrection of Christ is the sure proof of the Resurrection of Christians, for he has drawn us into himself in Holy Baptism. And what is more, he feeds us with his very resurrection body and blood in the Lord's Supper. Thus, we are in Christ and he is in us; for he who is the Resurrection and the Life feeds us with the medicine of immortality. For that is what the Body and Blood of Christ are, guarantees of everlasting life. For Jesus himself says, “Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my

blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. <sup>55</sup> For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.”

Thus is Easter not a once upon a time story, but a living and present reality. So rejoice Christian. Trust Christ more than you trust your eyes. For now, all your eyes can see is progressing death in your loved ones and bread and wine in the paten and chalice. But trust Christ's Word: our death is but a sleep, a rest with Christ; his sacrament is his real and true Body and Blood which give everlasting life. Distrust your eyes for now and trust Christ instead. And then, as Job says, in the resurrection on the last day your eyes will finally work right. They will finally catch up with the Word of Christ and you will see with your own eyes that your Redeemer lives. If you know this, you may pray with the hymnist:

Lord, let at last Thine angels come,  
 To Abram's bosom bear me home,  
 That I may die unfearing;  
 And in its narrow chamber keep  
 My body safe in peaceful sleep  
 Until Thy reappearing.  
 And then from death awaken me  
 That these mine eyes with joy may see,  
 O Son of God, Thy glorious face,  
 My Savior and my Fount of grace,  
 Lord Jesus Christ,  
 My prayer attend, my prayer attend,  
 And I will praise Thee without end.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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Now the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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