

Festival of the Resurrection of Our Lord | St. Mark 16:1-8
April 16, 2017 | Saude & Jerico Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

+ + +

EXORDIUM

In 1974, some farmers in China were digging a well when they bumped into clay pieces, arrowheads, and artifacts. Their discovery turned out to be an army of some 8,000 clay warriors, chariots, and horses buried deep in the soil. This Terracotta Army was put there by the first emperor to rule over a unified China. He ruled over a great empire, but that was not enough for him. He wanted his reign to go on forever. He sent many on the quest to find some elixir of life, which might make him immortal.

He became convinced that these life-giving properties were hidden in the mysterious substance that we know as mercury. Legend has it that he consumed this liquid metal, which of course did not make him stronger and healthier but sicker and sicker. Before his death, he commanded the construction of a vast underground city, including that Terracotta Army and rivers of mercury, so that his spirit would have something to rule over in the afterlife. This is what comes of humankind's attempt to get eternal life. The task fails woefully, and the great plans of proud people end up dead and buried.

If you would have life, if you would grab hold of the one thing that will not slip through your fingers, then you would have Jesus. Jesus does not send you on a mission to uncover the secret of life hidden away somewhere in the world. This is a world of death, brought about by sin. Jesus came to rescue us from this empty world and to bring us to the place where death is no more. The way to rescue us was not to conquer worldly authorities, but to defeat the powers of darkness. He drank the poisonous cup of our sin and entered the dungeon of death, so that this spiritual mercury could no longer harm us. Then He rose again from the grave, victorious over sin, leading us from the death that awaits us to the life which we shall have with Him.

Jesus is our elixir of life, which we consume by faith in Him. In Him, we need not fear death, for He is risen indeed! Let us now rise to sing hymn #348 - "He Is Arisen! Glorious Word!"

+ + +

Lord God, heavenly Father, You delivered Your Son for our offenses, and raised Him again for our justification: We beseech You, grant us Your Holy Spirit, that He may rule and govern us according to Your will; graciously keep us in the true faith, defend us from all sins, and after this life raise us to eternal life; through the same, Your beloved Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen. (ELH p. 155)

The sermon text for this morning is taken from the sixteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Mark. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome brought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. And very early in the morning, on the

first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they said among themselves, "Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?" But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away—for it was very large. / And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. But go your way, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you." / And they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. ^(NKJV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who won the victory for us over death and hell, dear fellow redeemed:

Before we can appreciate what today's Gospel tells us, we need to make sure we are clear about what led up to it. First of all, what was it that happened to Jesus on the Friday before this? He was sentenced to death by the Jewish religious leaders and handed over to the Romans for execution. Roman soldiers flogged Him, drove a crown of thorns into His head, and led Him to Calvary where they nailed His hands and feet to a cross. This was done just outside Jerusalem, so many people saw Jesus hanging there. He most certainly was crucified.

Since the Jewish holy day, the Sabbath, would begin at sundown, a request was made that the death of Jesus and the two criminals might be hastened and their bodies taken away. *"So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with [Jesus]. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water"* (Jn. 19:32-34). The soldiers were not at all doubtful about what had come of Jesus. He most certainly was dead.

Then two members of the Jewish Sanhedrin, secret disciples of Jesus, took His body and bound it in linen cloths along with burial spices. They brought His body to a cemetery nearby and placed Him in an unused tomb. Then they rolled a great stone over the entrance of the tomb and departed just before sundown (Jn. 19:38-42). Their actions were witnessed by some women who had followed Jesus from Galilee. They made plans to return to the tomb after the Sabbath to apply more spices and ointments (Lk. 23:54-56). There was no question about it, Jesus most certainly was buried.

I

So far, nothing about these facts give the impression that Jesus was anything more than a man, who died a painful death and was committed to his tomb. But the chief priests and Pharisees were nervous. They went to Pontius Pilate and said, *"Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.' Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first"* (Mt. 27:63-64). Pilate gave them permission to secure the tomb as they wished, so they sealed the stone and set a guard there.

As they had been planning since Friday afternoon, the women returned to the tomb early Sunday morning as the sun was rising. They likely did not know about the guards posted there,

who almost certainly would not have allowed them to enter the tomb. The women wondered along the way how they could remove the great stone blocking the entrance. They never would have guessed that the one to do it would be an angel! The evangelist Matthew says that with a great earthquake, an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled back the stone, and sat on it (28:2). The guards were petrified with fear at the sight of the angel, and the women were afraid too. *"His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow"* (28:3).

But what was even more significant than the appearance of this angel, was what they did not see. They did not see the body of Jesus in the tomb! The tomb was empty! And it was not as though Jesus had slipped past them somehow while their attention was diverted. By the time the angel appeared and rolled away the stone, Jesus had already left the tomb. He had already been raised. *"He is not here,"* the angel declared. *"See the place where they laid Him."*

A crucifixion, a death, and a burial could have happened to anyone, but not a resurrection. A dead person coming back from the dead by his own power had never happened before. What could this mean? It could mean that what Jesus said about Himself was true, that He was not simply a Man born of Mary, but was also true God, begotten of the Father from eternity. It could mean that what He said He came to do—save sinners—was actually done. In fact, this is what it *does* mean. This is what it *must* mean. No one else in history has done this. All the great people of the world who have died are still dead. But Jesus lives!

II

And this changes everything. Jesus' resurrection means it was no mere man who hung on the cross, but God Himself. And God who is perfect certainly would not be suffering for His own sins. It was for you, for your sins. His death likewise was not a death to benefit Himself. He died your death, to save you from eternal death in hell. So then it was not just a man wrapped in cloths, covered in spices, and sealed in the tomb. It was the God who cannot decay and who cannot be trapped in any tomb.

If Jesus had not risen, He would have been remembered for awhile by His followers, but He may well have been lost to history. There would be no Christianity. There would probably be more false religions than there are now, but one would be no better than the other. Without a risen Jesus, there is no peace between God and man. Without a risen Jesus, there is no promise of eternal life and salvation by faith alone. Without a risen Jesus, you would have to be your own savior, desperately trying to please a God who you can imagine would not be very happy with you.

But Jesus has risen! What that means for you is what Romans 4:25 says, that Jesus *"was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification."* He died on the cross to atone for your sins, and He rose again to prove that His sacrifice was accepted by His Father. The empty tomb on Easter morning means that God does not count your sins against you anymore. It declares that there is no sin left to make satisfaction for. Jesus' empty tomb is the exclamation point punctuating His saving work.

His resurrection changes everything for you. When you endure suffering and hardship in this world, you can look to the One who suffered intensely in the place of sinners but who now is glorified. When you face your death, you can take comfort in knowing that your death is no

more final than it was for Jesus, who rose again in victory. When you lay a brother or sister in Christ to rest in the grave, you can know that their rest is only a temporary one, as Christ's was, for they will rise again as He did. Instead of living a hopeless life under the dark cloud of death, in Christ you can anticipate life and peace and joy forevermore.

This starts at your Baptism where you were buried and raised with Jesus. It continues whenever you hear God's powerful Word of grace which brings you the forgiveness Jesus won for you. And at the Communion rail, you eat and drink the food of life, because you there consume the body and blood of Him who will never die again. In this way covered and cleansed and filled by Jesus, you need not be alarmed by the threat of death. Death will not get the last word; it must give way to the King of Life. Jesus has the final say, and He declares victory. The Lord is risen! **He is risen indeed!** Amen.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

+ + +