

The Festival of the Resurrection of Our Lord
St. Mark 16:1-8: "Jesus' Resurrection Verifies All His Promises."
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EXORDIUM

Is your faith worthless? Many say that it is. They say faith is for the weak-minded. Faith is what people hide behind to remain in their ignorance. Faith is based on feelings while reason is based on facts. When faith is mischaracterized like this, it is a fairly easy target.

But what is faith exactly? Faith is trust. It is taking someone at their word. It is believing that something will happen or be done even if it is outside our control. Everyone operates by faith to some extent. A child believes there will be food on the table tomorrow because there was food on the table today. An employee believes he will be compensated for his work again just like he has been compensated in the past. So faith is not based on feelings at all. It is based on promises and often on the evidence of what has taken place in the past.

The same is true of the Christian's faith. Our faith is based on the promises Jesus made and on what He accomplished. But why Him out of all the significant people in history? What sets Him apart from all the rest is that after He died – a death that was verified by professional soldiers –, He came alive and left His tomb. This is what makes Jesus unique. He died and then He came back to life.

What makes it even more amazing is that Jesus predicted His resurrection in advance. This was not like picking the winning team in the NCAA tournament or calling a home run with the point of a bat. Those things are humanly possible. Jesus did something impossible. He conquered death itself. Death was able to hang on to Jesus for parts of three days, but only because He let it. He made a mockery of death. He took all its power away.

Jesus didn't do this for His own benefit. He did it for you. He died and rose again for you. He died to make payment for your sins, and He rose to claim victory over your death. "All of this is yours by faith," He says. *"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die"* (Joh. 11:25-26, ESV).

So your faith is not worthless. It is not evidence of weak-mindedness, and it is not based on your feelings. It is based on the facts of what Jesus said and what He did. Because He is risen from the dead just as He promised, your sins are all forgiven and eternal life is yours (1Co. 15:17). We now rise to sing our exordium hymn, "He Is Arisen! Glorious Word!" (#348):

He is arisen! Glorious Word!
Now reconciled is God, my Lord;
The gates of heaven are open.
My Jesus died triumphantly,
And Satan's arrows broken lie,

Destroyed hell's direst weapon.
O hear
What cheer!
Christ victorious
Riseth glorious,
Life He giveth—
He was dead, but see, He liveth!

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The sermon text for today 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, whose resurrection proves that He is who He claimed to be, dear fellow redeemed:

When the women set out early Sunday morning, they expected to find a dead body. There were no doubts about it. They saw Jesus die on the cross, and they saw Joseph take Him down and put Him in a tomb. They felt totally helpless and hopeless. The most remarkable person they had ever known was gone. They had followed Him all the way from Galilee listening to His comforting words and witnessing His wonderful works. And now He was dead.

They weren't ready to let go. The only thing they could think to do was bring spices after the Sabbath to give Him a more proper burial. After that, there were no answers, no guarantees, only more questions. We know how this feels. We know what it's like to lose someone who was such a big part of our life that nothing could be the same for us again. We don't know what to do next, so we focus on the present—funeral preparations, paperwork, sharing memories with family and friends.

But as the women approached the tomb filled with grief and focused on the task at hand, they looked up and saw something unexpected. The stone that they didn't know how to remove had

already been rolled away! Did someone know they were coming? Did others have the same intentions they did? Or was something more sinister going on? The women didn't know.

They stepped carefully through the doorway and looked around the dim interior. On the right side of the tomb, they saw a man, but it wasn't Jesus. Today's text describes him as "*a young man clothed in a long white robe.*" The evangelists Matthew and Luke include more details about him. They say that his appearance was "*like lightning,*" and that his clothes shone like snow in the bright sun (Mat. 28:3, Luk. 24:4). It's no wonder that the women were alarmed!

This "*young man*" was really an angel of God, a messenger sent to deliver news that the women did not expect to hear. "*[Jesus] is risen!*" said the angel. "*He is not here.... [T]ell His disciples – and Peter – that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you.*" The women were full of sorrow when they made their way to the tomb. Now they rushed away from the tomb and back to the city with trembling and amazement.

Just two days earlier, Jesus had been crucified while the prominent religious leaders and Roman officials looked on with approval. Jesus' disciples went into hiding. They figured they were next. Those were dark days. But with the report of the women came a glimmer of hope. Could it be? Could the Lord who raised Lazarus from the dead actually raise Himself?

It is surprising that the news from the women caught them off guard, and that they doubted it. Jesus told them this would happen! At least three times prior to Holy Week, Jesus told the disciples He would die and then rise on the third day (Mar. 8:31, 9:31, 10:34). As recently as Thursday evening, He said that He would rise from the dead and meet His disciples in Galilee (Mar. 14:28). He was not lying. He was not speaking figuratively. He was telling them the truth.

Jesus always tells the truth. He does not lie. Everything that He predicted would happen did happen. His death and burial was the greatest test of His truthfulness. If He did not rise from the dead on the third day, all of His promises would have been proven false. They would have died right along with Him. But by rising from the dead, everything He claimed about Himself and everything He promised was verified. Who can argue with someone who defeated death itself?

Jesus' resurrection is the great dividing line in all of human history. If you believe that Jesus rose from the dead, then you are obviously going to pay attention to what He said. His resurrection gives authority to His Word. On the other hand, if you believe that Jesus did not rise from the dead, then you will not care about His Word at all.

We see the difference very clearly in the way believers and unbelievers deal with death. When an unbeliever loses someone, a gaping hole opens up in their heart that nothing can fill – not food or alcohol or revisiting old memories or looking for some evidence that the spirit of their loved one is still with them. Their loved one is gone, and there is no reason to think they will ever be reunited again.

Christians likewise feel the pain of death and the void that is left. But they have somewhere to take their pain, and they know where to find peace. They take their pain to Jesus. He knows the pain of death. He endured it Himself, and He also wept at the death of a close friend. He invites

us to bring our pain and grief to Him, and He promises to give us comfort and rest. He knows our pain, and He knows how to relieve it.

He calls us to hold tightly to His promise of life even when a casket is lowered into the ground. It appears that death is the end for someone we love. But Jesus says, "No. This is just a sleep. This is only temporary. The soul of your loved one is safe with Me. This child of God will rise just as I rose. *Because I live, you also will live*" (Joh. 14:19).

The resurrection of the faithful, including your own resurrection from the dead, is promised and sealed to you on Baptism day. At your Baptism, Jesus rescued you from the kingdom of darkness and brought you into His kingdom of light. He applied His saving work to you by bringing you the forgiveness He won on the cross, and by covering you in His righteousness through His perfect fulfillment of the Law. You went to Baptism bearing the blame of sin inherited from our first parents and deserving eternal death. But you emerged from Baptism a new creation, walking in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-4).

Baptism united you with Jesus, who will never die again. That means His resurrection victory and His unending life are yours. It sounds unbelievable, too good to be true. But then again, so did Jesus' promise that He would rise from the dead on the third day. Jesus kept that promise, and He will keep the promise He made to you at your Baptism.

The baptized who die in faith truly do "rest in peace." They remain in the grave only for a short time, and then they will come to life again. On the last day, our gravestone flowers will be no more necessary than the women's burial spices. With a shout from the mouth of our Lord, all the tombs will be emptied, and all believers in Him will come forth in glory. Then our sorrow over death will eternally cease, and we will live on forever and ever and ever.

This is your comfort as you grieve the death of those who have gone on before you. And it is your comfort when you one day face your own death. Jesus did not stay in the tomb. He rose just as He said He would. Because He kept that promise, you can believe beyond a shadow of a doubt that He will raise you and all the dead on the day of His glorious return. Jesus has promised to do this, and He always keeps His promises.

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.

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