

The Resurrection of Our Lord – Pr. Faugstad exordium & sermon
St. Mark 16:1-8: “The Holy Angels of God Proclaim His Gospel.”
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In Nomine Iesu

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The miracle-worker died, but his followers refused to accept it. “He will rise again!” they said. So they waited. They waited one day. Then two. On the third day, nothing happened. Weeks passed, then months. Then more than a year and a half had gone by. Finally the funeral home obtained a court order and buried the man’s body.

This actually happened in South Africa. A pastor who claimed to be able to heal the sick, and who reportedly predicted his own resurrection, stayed dead. He did not have the power he thought he had or said he had.

There is only one Man who predicted His own resurrection and then did it. We are gathered here today to hear His Word and sing His praises. Even though He had done countless miracles and even raised several people from the dead, His closest disciples did not believe He would rise. The eleven disciples went into hiding after He was crucified and buried. The women made plans to return to His tomb after the Sabbath to anoint His dead body with more spices.

The only ones who seemed to take Jesus’ prediction seriously were the chief priests and Pharisees. They went to 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*” (Mat. 27:63-64). All this accomplished was putting witnesses at the tomb—the soldiers—who watched an angel descend from heaven and roll away the stone revealing an empty tomb. They reported what they saw to the chief priests, who, instead of hearing what they said, paid them to tell a lie (28:11-15).

But the resurrection of Jesus is no lie. It happened just as Jesus said it would, on the third day after His death. He did break the chains of death. He did emerge victorious. He did end the terrible reign of death brought into the world by Adam’s sin. He did it for the doubters, for the weak, for the faithless, for sinners—for you and me.

In thankfulness and joy, let us rise to sing hymn #348, “He Is Arisen! Glorious Word!”

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. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who was not in the tomb on Easter morning, but who is here with us to bless us, dear fellow redeemed:

Many people claim to have seen angels. Some of them say angels appeared when they were in great distress or sorrow and brought them comfort. Others report messages spoken to them by the angels, special messages from God. The problem is, sometimes those messages do not agree with what the Bible says. So which is more reliable: a special visit from an angel or the Word of God?

If someone is given a message by a holy angel, it will not contradict the Word of God. The angels who serve God are without sin; they only tell the truth. So if an angel speaks a message that conflicts with the Word of God, it is not a holy angel. St. Paul writes that "*even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light*" (2Co. 11:14). Many prominent false teachers in history claim to have been visited by angels who gave them their new teachings. But these were not holy angels. They were the devil or demons coming in disguise.

So how can we know that the angel who spoke to the women at Jesus' tomb was really sent by God? How can we be sure that it wasn't just something they imagined in their state of emotional turmoil and sorrow? When the women went to Jesus' tomb early Sunday morning, they went there expecting to find a dead man—if they could roll away the stone from the entrance to get to Him.

Instead, they looked up and saw that the stone had already been rolled away. That was strange. And when they cautiously peaked inside, they did not see the body of Jesus. They saw a young

man wearing a long, white robe—an angel. Seeing their distress and alarm, the angel told them there was no need to fear. Why? There was no need to fear because Jesus had done everything He said He would do.

The angel didn't tell them anything new. Jesus had told His disciples multiple times that He would go to Jerusalem to suffer, die, and on the third day rise again. And when they were in Jerusalem the night of His arrest, He told His disciples that they would all desert Him, but after He was raised up, He would go before them to Galilee (Mar. 14:27-28). Now the angel was saying the same thing: Jesus *"was crucified. He is risen!... He is going before you into Galilee... as He said to you."*

That is the message the women took back to the disciples. The appearance of the angel was surprising, but the words he spoke should not have been surprising. He simply reminded them what they had already heard. That's what the holy angels do. They proclaim the promises of God. Isn't that what the angels did the night of Jesus' birth? They proclaimed the fulfillment of God's promise: *"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord"* (Luk. 2:11).

You can be sure that if an angel appears to you and speaks a message that does not agree with the Bible's teaching, it is not an angel of God. St. Paul said that there are some who *"want to distort the gospel of Christ."* Then he adds, *"But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed"* (Gal. 1:7-8). But how can we know that the Gospel is true? Or how can we be sure we have the right Gospel?

That topic came up in a conversation I had with a Mormon man. Before I knew his religious background, he asked me a question that every Lutheran pastor loves to hear, "What is the Gospel?" But I could tell as I explained the Gospel to him that he wasn't convinced. It was a "gotcha question." He wanted to make the point that if all of the different denominations of Christians had different understandings of the Gospel, none of us could be certain we had the right one. That's why we needed a modern-day prophet to give the correct interpretation—a prophet like Joseph Smith (who, incidentally, claimed to get his special revelations from an "angel").

But we can know the Gospel from the Bible and be certain that we have the true Gospel. The angel sitting in that tomb couldn't have said it more plainly: Jesus *"was crucified. He is risen!"* That is the good news. That is the Gospel. A dead man rose from the dead! But it wasn't just any dead man. It was a dead man who claimed to be the Son of God. It was a dead man who predicted that everything would happen just as it happened. It was a dead man who said that His victory over death would be your victory, that His life would be your life.

Jesus' resurrection verified everything He ever said. He could have said what He did, died on the cross, and never been seen or heard from again. That would have proven that He was nothing more than a big talker, or that He was delusional. But that is not what happened. He did rise from the dead. We believe it not just because an angel said it happened. We believe it because Jesus showed Himself alive to the women later that morning, to His disciples on numerous occasions, and at one time to more than five hundred of His followers (1Co. 15:6). He

talked with them, ate with them, and definitively proved that He is who He said –the Son of God in the flesh.

The disciples wrote down what they saw and heard, so that everyone could learn about Jesus and what He had done. Jesus hadn't just accomplished something for His time. He had done something for all time. His apostle John wrote near the end of His Gospel account: *"these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name"* (Joh. 20:31).

Our faith in Jesus is not a special feeling we have about Him. It is not a decision we made when considering various faith systems. Our faith in Jesus is a confidence worked in us by God the Holy Spirit through the message of His Gospel. It is a confidence that because Jesus rose from the dead, we will rise. Because He lives forever, we will live forever. We know how ridiculous and impossible it sounds that a severely beaten and crucified man should rise from the dead a couple days later, alive and well, walking around and visiting with people all over the place.

But this was not just any man. This was God-in-the-flesh who won the victory for you. He went to the cross and crushed the devil's head by paying for your sins. And He conquered death by coming alive on the very day He said He would. Sin, devil, and death could not stop Him. They met an Enemy who had them shaking in their boots.

This is the Lord and Savior who joined Himself to your flesh, so that He could do everything for you that you couldn't do. And He has joined Himself to you in an even more personal way. He made you a member of His holy body through your Baptism into Him, cleansing you of your sins and covering you in His righteousness. And He feeds you and fills you with His life by giving you His immortal body and blood in His holy Supper. He graciously comes to you and me through His Word and Sacraments, so that even though outwardly we are wasting away, inwardly He renews us day by day (2Co. 4:16).

The Bible says that the angels are amazed by the gracious care God has for us. The gifts the Holy Spirit gives us through the Gospel are *"things into which angels long to look"* (1Pe. 1:12). So we do not need to wait for a special visit from an angel to know that God loves us. We do not need to seek comfort in our grief from strange coincidences, appearances of certain animals, or from other signs that seem to convey messages from those who are now dead.

We need the Gospel. We need to hear the message again and again that our sins are forgiven, that eternal life is ours through faith in Jesus, and that He will raise our bodies and the bodies of all our loved ones from the dead when He comes again in glory. That is the message God sent His holy angels to proclaim when His Son entered this world and when He rose in triumph out of the dark tomb.

And that is the message we still proclaim today and every day. We want our family, our friends, and even our enemies to hear the saving truth that **Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

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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