

The Resurrection of Our Lord: Mark 16:1–8

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Preached on Easter Day, Year B

Jesus Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Jesus Christ is risen. And life can never be the same again.

Three women went to the cemetery early that morning on the first day of the week expecting to find a body. They were going to finish some unfinished business. Jesus' burial had been hasty. Their Friend and Teacher had not been given the proper honor and dignity in His death which He deserved. The Jewish people considered it the highest act of love that one person could do for another, to provide for a decent and honorable burial. Therefore, we shouldn't be surprised to find these three women up bright and early on Sunday morning carrying spices to anoint the body of Jesus.

In their haste, they neglected a few small but important details. Like who was going to help them roll the massive stone away? They probably should have brought along couple of the fishermen like Peter and John. There were some other potential problems, such as the soldiers that were posted to guard the tomb, or the fact that the tomb had been sealed by Pilate at the request of the religious leaders.

As they drew near to the tomb in the early morning light, other questions took over. The stone had already been rolled away. The tomb was open. They tentatively looked inside. A young man sitting to the right of the place where the body of Jesus had laid, dressed in white – an angel. The women were amazed. The translation you heard says “alarmed.” The word suggests a mixture of fear, surprise, wonder, and astonishment – the sort of thing that makes eyes open wide, mouths hang open, and the hairs on the back of your neck stand up on end. No wonder. It's not every day you see an angel, especially in the place where you were expecting to find the dead body of your best friend.

The angel brings good news. Who would have expected to hear good news from the grave of a friend? “You seek Jesus, the Nazarene, the Crucified One. He is risen; he is not here.” The news must have hit like a ton of bricks. It was the right Jesus – the one who came from

Nazareth, the one who had been nailed to the cross. They had seen the whole thing with their own eyes. And now the angel is telling them the most amazing thing: “He is risen, He is not here.” He shows them the place where the body of Jesus had been laid to rest.

Now what would have gone through your mind, if you were standing there at the tomb along with the women? He is risen indeed, alleluia? Probably not. Dead men don’t rise. The work of grave robbers, perhaps. Or a cruel hoax by the Roman soldiers. Or conspiracy with the religious authorities. But not resurrection. Not that. Just about anything but that.

Jesus had told them in advance. Jesus had said on at least three occasions that he would be handed over, crucified, and on the third day rise again. He said, “Destroy this temple (referring to His body), and in three days I will raise it up again.” He even raised his friend Lazarus from the dead to make the point that He had the power over death itself. And yet in spite of all the advance warning, in spite of everything Jesus had said to them, in spite of His miracles that showed He even death obeyed Him, His disciples did not initially believe the good news of His resurrection. The women expected to find a dead body in the grave. The last thing they expected was an empty tomb and an angel.

The Corinthians in St. Paul’s day had similar problems with the resurrection. They were influenced by pagan Greek philosophy which said that the body was low material level stuff and the soul was high level spiritual stuff and that the two just don’t mix. Escape the body and move up a notch on the spiritual ladder. That group of people down in San Diego who referred to their bodies as “vehicles” or “containers” were following the same line of reasoning. In killing themselves, they wanted to escape their bodies, “shed their containers,” so to speak, and move up to a higher spiritual plane.

That kind of thinking even creeps into Christian conversation on occasion, though we ought to know better. You occasionally hear of people talk about their “spiritual experiences” apart from the body. They speak of encountering Christ in the inner recesses of their emotions and experiences instead of in the preached Word and the Sacrament. We even hear some Christians today speak of “out of body” experiences, as if that were a good thing. Sometimes one hears eternal life described in terms of disembodied souls floating around in a place called heaven, which doesn’t sound too different from that UFO cult in San Diego. Just replace the UFO with God and you have basically the same thing.

We are funny it comes to the body. On the one hand you might say that we are obsessed with our bodies. We pamper our them, indulge them, diet them, exercise them, massage them, measure them, repropotion them. On the other hand we live as if our bodies had no eternal consequences or meaning, that the body is like a soda pop can to be discarded when it's no longer useful.

We worry about what goes into our bodies, but think little of the greed, lies, hatred, bitterness or immorality that comes out them. We worry about the condition of our drinking water, more than putting the water of our Baptism to daily use. We worry about the bread on our supper tables more than the Bread of Life on the Lord's table. We are more concerned that our children know computers and the Internet than whether they know the Catechism and the Liturgy.

What happens to our bodies matters to God. God created our bodies. He baptizes them. He nourishes them. He blesses them. He makes our bodies His temple, His dwelling place. St. Paul said we all must give an account on the last day for what we have done in the body – whether good or evil. We are to glorify God with our bodies. What goes on with our bodies matters to God. It mattered enough for Him to send His Son to be conceived and born, to suffer in His body for our sakes, to take up our sin and death into His body, to have His body nailed to a tree and to die, and to rise from the dead in His body.

The body is what Easter is about. It's about God redeeming our bodies in the body of His Son. It's about the physical resurrection from the dead. The One who was crucified lives. His body that was pierced by nails and a spear is alive. That's the good news of Easter. Jesus who was dead now lives. The tomb is empty; the stone is rolled away; death has lost its death grip on humanity. The shroud has been pulled away; the disgrace of death has been swallowed up in God's victory. The tears of our grief are wiped away by the hand of God. Jesus lives!

What does Jesus' resurrection mean for us?

It means, first of all, that Jesus is who He says He is. He is the Son of God, the Savior of the world. He is the Christ – Messiah. He is everything He said He is: the Resurrection and the Life, the Way, the Truth and the Llife. He is the only way to the Father, the only door to heaven, the only Source of salvation. Talk is plentiful, but resurrections are rare. Great teachers, moral philosophers, and ethical men we have aplenty. But men who rise from the dead after being nailed to a cross are another matter. There is only One in human history who

died and rose from the dead never to die again. Only One who was crucified and rose. You can't ignore the resurrection. You cannot leave from here stuck in neutral. There is no neutral position on a crucified and risen Jesus. Either He must be confessed and adored as Lord and Christ, or He must be denied and dismissed as a hoax and a fraud.

When St. Paul spoke to the Greek philosophers at Athens, he didn't spend much time and energy debating religious systems and philosophies. He simply proclaimed Jesus crucified and raised from the dead. The resurrection is the key. It is the historic fact that confronts the world. It is the pivotal point around which all of human history turns. Nothing has ever been the same in this world since that first Easter Sunday, early in the morning, when the women encountered an open, empty tomb.

Never mind this notion that the resurrection is a pious myth. Jesus was seen risen from the dead by over 500 men who were willing to go to a martyr's death confessing His Name. This was at a time when the Roman government and the Jewish authorities held all the cards. If there had been a body to produce, they would have produced it, and put it on public display to silence the rumors of resurrection. Remember Peter, who went from denier to preacher in 50 short days; from someone who was too sheepish to admit being a disciple of Jesus to a servant girl, to one who preached Jesus to thousands at Pentecost. What could account for such a transformation? What happened to Peter in so short a time? Jesus had risen from the dead, that's what happened, and Peter had seen Him, and heard Him, and eaten with Him.

The resurrection means that Jesus' death is the sufficient sacrifice for our sins. The Father has accepted the death of His Son and raised Him from the dead to prove it. When Jesus said, "It is finished" on the cross, the work of our redemption actually was finished, completed, done. Salvation was won. The death of Jesus stands over and against our sin. Nothing more needs to be done. Jesus has absorbed our sin into His body and nailed it to death. And now He has risen to say, "I won. I conquered death for you. Trust in me and not in your selves and you will never die."

The resurrection means that Jesus is true to His Word. He said He would rise from the dead in three days, and He did, contrary to the expectations of His slow to believe disciples. That means we can take Jesus at His Word when He says that those who believe and are baptized will be saved. Or when He says that the bread of His Supper really is His body, and the wine is His blood. Or when He says that His ministers have His permission to forgive and retain sins in His stead. Those promises are sure. You can live and die with them. Christ will not lie to

you or deceive you. Men may lie or deceive, but Christ will not. His Word is true, and He is true to His Word. His rising from the dead shows it.

The resurrection means that the new creation has come in the crucified and risen body of Jesus. St. Paul calls Jesus the first-fruits of the those who have fallen asleep. The first-fruits are like that first tomato to ripen on the vine. It is the sign of more to come. The resurrection of Jesus means that there is more rising from the dead to come. Death has been dealt the decisive death blow. Christ has taken the sting out of death by dying for us. You and I live in a unique time, the time of the resurrection. The new creation has come. Jesus rose on a Sunday, the first day of the week, the first day of a new creation. That's one reason the Church has always gathered for divine service on Sunday. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come."

What a comfort this is! There is hope in Christ. Though these bodies of ours are dying a tiny bit each day, yet they will live because Christ lives. Every prayer for healing in the hospital, in the nursing home, at the sickbed is answered "yes" for the believer in Christ – if not now, then in the resurrection on the Last Day.

The resurrection means that the Jesus who comes to us in Baptism, in Absolution, and especially in the His Supper, is the same Jesus who died and rose again. The One who has conquered death comes to us and meets with us in our death. The women fled from the tomb that morning, trembling, bewildered, silent, fearful – until later that day when Jesus came to them. Then their fear gave way to gladness. And so it is also with us. We may know the facts of the resurrection. We may hear the report. But only a personal encounter with the crucified and risen Christ in Baptism, in the Absolution, in the Lord's supper, in His body the Church, will calm our trembling, quiet our fears, and open our mouths to tell others. We meet Jesus where He has told us He would come to us – in His Word, in His Supper, in His Church, where even as few as two or three are gathered in His Name to receive His gifts.

Our lives will never be the same again. They cannot be. Jesus has risen from the dead!

"Surely this is our God; we trust in him, and he saved us. This is the LORD, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation." Amen.

SOURCE

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