

Do Not Be Alarmed
Mark 16:1-8
Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri
April 16, 2017 – The Resurrection of Our Lord



In the name of the Father, and of † the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Before dawn, very early on that first Easter morning, we find three women heading out to the cemetery – fully expecting to finish some unfinished business concerning the burial of the body of Jesus. In the afternoon before that Sabbath Jesus' entombment had necessarily been hasty – and because of that their Friend and Teacher had not been given the proper honor and dignity due Him in death. That's why these women were coming to the tomb – to see that everything would be put properly in order. But in their haste and hurry, it seems they neglected to consider a few small, important, details – like who was going to help them roll away the massive stone – and how they would deal with the soldiers who had been posted there as guards.

As they drew near to the tomb in the light of early morn, other questions soon began to overtake them. First, they discovered that the stone had already been rolled away, and that the tomb was now standing wide open. They tentatively looked inside – just to the right of the place where the body of Jesus had been laid three days before. And there they saw a young man sitting – a young man dressed in white – an angel. They were amazed and alarmed – filled with fear, surprise, wonder, and astonishment. Perhaps if you'd been there you might have seen them staggering back with eyes open wide, chins hanging down, and the hair on the back of their necks standing up on end. After all, it's not every day you see an angel – especially in that place where you expected to find the dead body of your best Friend.

And what did they hear from the mouth of the angel? They heard these words: "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus, the Nazarene, the Crucified One. He is not here. He is risen!" This news must have hit them like a ton of bricks. The angel was certainly speaking about the right Jesus – the One who had come from Nazareth and three days earlier had been nailed to the cross. To be sure, all three of them had witnessed the whole sordid episode with their own eyes. Yet now, here, was this angel telling them a most amazing thing. From the very place where the body of Jesus had been laid to rest, he spoke to them, saying: "He is not here. He is risen!"

Now what would have gone through your mind if you had been standing there at the tomb on that first Easter morn? Your first reaction, I suspect – like theirs – would have been to doubt the angel's words. After all, dead men don't rise from the grave, do they? Perhaps it was the work of grave robbers, a cruel hoax by Roman soldiers, or a conspiracy foisted on them by the religious authorities – anything but a Resurrection! But remember, on at least

three occasions Jesus had told His disciples He would have to be handed over, crucified, and on the third day rise again. He even raised His friend Lazarus from the dead to make the point that He held the power over death. Yet, in spite of the advance warning and the miracles that showed even death had to obey Him, His disciples refused to believe the Good News of His Resurrection.

The Corinthians of St. Paul's day had similar problems. They lived under the influence of a pagan Greek philosophy which taught that the body was low-level material stuff, while the soul was high-level spiritual stuff – and that body and soul could not mix under any circumstance. Sadly, that same kind of thinking creeps into Christian conversation today on occasion – even though we ought to know better. You've undoubtedly heard people talking about "spiritual experiences" they've had apart from – or outside the body. You've heard them speak about how they "encountered" Christ in the inner recesses of their emotions – rather than in Word and Sacrament. And how many of us have thought of eternal life as if the saints of heaven somehow resembled disembodied souls floating around in outer space?

We're kind of funny when it comes to our bodies, aren't we? On the one hand you might say we're obsessed with our bodies – pampering them, indulging them, dieting them, exercising them, massaging them, measuring them, and re-proportioning them. On the other hand, though, we live as if our bodies had no eternal consequence or meaning at all – like a soda can discarded when it's no longer of any use. So, we worry precious little about what goes into our bodies – and think little about the greed, lies, hatred, bitterness and immorality that comes out of our bodies. We worry more about the state of our drinking water, than we do with putting the water of our Baptism into daily use. We concern ourselves more with the bread on our supper table than we do about eating the Bread of Life from the Lord's table. And we're more likely to teach our children about computers than we are the Scriptures, the Catechism, the Liturgy and the faith.

But the fact is that what happens to our bodies matters to God, for God is the One who creates, Baptizes, nourishes, and blesses our bodies. He's the One who makes our bodies His temple – His dwelling place. That's why St. Paul reminds us that since we'll all have to give an account on the last day for what we've done *in* our bodies – whether good or evil – we are therefore to glorify God *with* our bodies. You see, our bodies matter enough to God that He was willing to send His Son to be conceived, born, and suffer in a body – to take up our sin and death

into His body – and to have that body nailed to a tree, die, and rise from the dead.

The body, dear friends, the body is what Easter is all about. It's about God redeeming our bodies in the body of His Son. It's about physical Resurrection from the dead – for the One who was crucified now lives. His body – once pierced by nails and spear – is still alive. That's the Good News of Easter. Jesus, who was dead, now lives in His body. The tomb is empty, the stone has been rolled away, and death has lost its death grip on us all. The shroud has been pulled aside, and the disgrace of death has been swallowed up in God's victory. Our tears of grief have been wiped away by the hand of God – and all because Jesus lives!

But what does that mean for us? It means, first of all, that Jesus is really who He says He is – the Son of God, the Savior of the world, the Christ, the Resurrection and the Life, the Way, the Truth, and yes, Life itself. He is the only Way to the Father, the only Door to heaven, and the sole Source of our salvation. Talk is plentiful, but Resurrections are rare. We have great teachers, moral philosophers, and ethical men in plenteous proportion – but men who rise from the dead after being nailed to a cross are another matter altogether. There is only One in human history who died and rose from the dead never to die again – only One! You can't ignore the Resurrection. You can't leave here this morning stuck in neutral. You must either confess and adore Jesus as Lord and Christ – or you must deny and dismiss Him as a hoax and a fraud!

When St. Paul spoke to the Greek philosophers in Athens, he didn't spend much time or energy debating religious systems or philosophies. He simply proclaimed Christ crucified and raised from the dead because he knew the Resurrection was the key – the one historic fact that confronts the world in its unbelief each and every day – the one 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 that open, empty tomb.

Now as to the notion that the Resurrection is nothing more than a pious myth, we know our Lord Christ was seen after His Resurrection from the dead by over 500 men who were willing to go to a martyr's death confessing His Name – and this during a time when the Roman government and the Jewish authorities held all the cards. If there had been a body to produce, you'd better believe they would have produced it and put it on public display to silence the rumors of the Resurrection. Remember Peter, who went from denier to preacher in fifty short days – who went from being too sheepish to admit he was a disciple of Jesus, to one who boldly preached Him to thousands at Pentecost? What could account for such a transformation? What could have happened to Peter in so short a time? Jesus rose from the dead – that's what. Peter saw

Him, heard Him, and ate with Him – and it changed him forever.

The Resurrection means that Jesus' death is the sufficient Sacrifice for all our sin. The Father accepted the death of His Son and raised Him to prove it. When from the cross Jesus cried out, "It is finished," His work of redemption was actually completed. Salvation had been won. Now the death of Jesus stands over and against our sin – because He has absorbed it all into His own body and nailed it to death on His cross. Now He is risen from the dead to say, "I conquered death *for you*. Trust in Me – not in yourself – and you will never die."

The Resurrection also means Jesus is true to His Word. He said He would rise from the dead in three days, and He did! 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 really His blood – or when He says that His ministers have authority to forgive and retain sins in His place. Those promises are sure and true. You know you can live and die with them, because Christ will not lie to or deceive you. His Word is true, He is true to His Word – and His rising from the dead proves it.

The Resurrection also finally means the new creation promised by God has now come in the crucified, risen body of Jesus. St. Paul calls Christ the First-Fruits of the those who have fallen asleep. First-fruits are like that first tomato to ripen on the vine. It's the sign of more to come. So, the Resurrection of Jesus means there's more rising from the dead to come. Death has been dealt the decisive death blow – and Christ has taken the sting out of death by dying for us all.

The women who fled from the tomb that first Easter morning were trembling, bewildered, silent, and fearful – that is, until later in the day when Jesus came to them again. It was then that their fear gave way to gladness. And so it is also with us. You may know all the facts surrounding Christ's Resurrection. You may have heard the report. But it's only a personal encounter with the crucified, risen Jesus in Baptism, Absolution, the Lord's Supper, and in His body, the Church, which can calm your trembling, quiet your fear, and open your mouth to tell others. We meet Jesus here – here, where He has promised He would come to us in His Word, in His Supper, and in His Church – whenever even as few as two or three are gathered in His Name to receive His gifts. Now our lives will never be the same again. Indeed, they cannot be. For Jesus – our Savior, our Christ, and our King – has risen from the dead! With the Prophet Isaiah we also now say: "Behold, this is our God. We have waited for Him and He will save us. This is the Lord. We have waited for Him. We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation." Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.