

A Quiet Easter Morning
Matthew 28:1-10 (John 20:1-18)
The Resurrection of our Lord
April 12, 2020

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text, *The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said."*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Circulating this past week were plans to have churches throughout our land toll their carillons and tower bells at 10:00 this Easter morning, to mark the resurrection with joy... though sanctuaries stand empty. It's a beautiful thought, but honestly – even if such effort is within earshot for you – *apart* from that, it might be a very quiet morning for you.

In a way, perhaps there's a silver lining in this. Though I'd much rather be *with* you, gathered in festal shouts around the throne of the Victorious Lamb, rejoicing with Him in His victory and partaking of the spoils of His war... nevertheless, I suppose there's something fitting about this quiet Easter morning. In fact, for the first time in 2000 years, the earth is probably about as calm and quiet as it was on that first Easter morn. When Christ first departed the tomb, He arose with no faithful gathered around him, no earthly shouts of Alleluia. To be sure, heaven made itself known with thunderous acclamation as the earth quaked and the angels appeared on the

scene. But, if you read the accounts carefully, that was *after* Jesus had already risen. Yes, when he arose, the world was still sleeping. Ever since, probably starting with the very first anniversary, the world has awoken early each Easter to meet the rising sun and devotionally 'run to the tomb' at daybreak. But, that first Easter, the glory of the resurrection may have been brilliant, but it had no audience. You might describe it with a phrase we equate with another moment of divine mystery: "All is calm, all is bright."

The question is "why?" In our surreal situation, some worry that such a quiet Easter is a picture of faithlessness, more concerned about illness and death than rejoicing at Christ's victory over Sin and Death. And, whether or not that's a proper concern or interpretation, do we not also understand that the *original* quiet morning of the resurrection was partly because the world had largely not understood the crucifixion, had largely ignored the sacrifice of God's Christ, the ministry of the Messiah, the life of life's Lord.

That's incredible to consider: the world had thousands of years of preparation, hundreds of years of prophecy, an entire divine book of the original covenant pointing forward to the Messiah, 400 years of divine silence followed by the years of divine ministry and mystery, of miracles and mountaintop sermons, of healings and raisings to life and casting out demons... all that pointed clearly and specifically to this Jesus of Nazareth as the fulfillment of all that had been promised. And with thousands of years of hopes and

prophecies riding on this Jesus, one would think all eyes would watch closely the unfolding of his crucifixion and all hearts would solemnly revere and cherish his sacrifice. But, as John reports, even among Jesus' closest disciples, his inner three, until John and Peter heard the women's report and ran to the tomb, "they as yet did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead."

So, when Jesus rose from the tomb, the morning was about as quiet as is this unique Easter morning around the world. Imagine, all the grand news of the resurrection was known only by a few women, eager to run and tell the disciples. It's not unlike the moment that *will be* when only a few – the Coronavirus Task Force – know the exciting news that it's time to re-open the community, and they are on their way to the location where the news will be shared, even as the rest of the nation continues to sit in gloom. But, very much *unlike* that image of a federal Task Force announcing the lifting of shelter-in-place guidelines, an announcement anticipated with eagerness by all, the news of Jesus' resurrection was eagerly anticipated by *none*... no one, for his faithful no longer seemed to recall the promise, and they all explained it away... the women thinking someone had taken the body away, the disciples thinking the words of the excited women were "an idle tale."

But the lack of a captive audience does not deter our Christ. The grave cannot hold him, whether or not there's anyone to celebrate it. Death cannot hold him, whether or not there's anyone

to rejoice in His conquering life. In other words, the certainty of the resurrection does not depend on you and your worship. The certainty of the resurrection does not depend on full sanctuaries or tolling bells. Your worship does not make Easter; rather Easter makes your worship, elicits your worship.

And that worship is the joy of the heart that hears his word and believes in, rejoices in, cherishes the good news. That worship is the eagerness of the faith that anticipates the opportunity to gather again with our brothers and sisters and all the company of heaven around the altar of God, complete with the image of the victorious Lamb, and feast on the body and blood of our risen Lord... that same body and blood that once rose and exited the tomb in even quieter fashion than it now is given to those Christians around the world who are able to commune this glorious Easter morn.

And such joy and eagerness occupy us *not* because we thereby make the Gospel true, but because faith burns to benefit from that Gospel truth, to be given a share of that victory. For apart from that victory we are lost; apart from a share in Christ's triumph, we are forever separated from God, forever captive to death and hell and the devil, forever enduring an isolation that is not a shelter-in-place of safety, but a solitude of sin and condemnation.

Instinctively, we know this. Instinctively, we know what our sin deserves. Instinctively, we know that the affliction of pestilence and the threat of temporal death from which we seek to hide is a

mere window into the far greater death. For, the far greater death is not merely the cessation of breath, but an eternal number of breaths under the weight of the divine wrath. And, if the very Christ sent to redeem us from this threat is not risen, if his death was not sufficient, then our hope was in vain, our sin remains, and we only have reason to fear any message that comes from the holy God. Yes, even the angels that fill imaginations with delight would fill hearts with fear if they carried news of God's vengeance.

Perhaps this is why the guards – “for fear of the angel” – tremble and become like dead men. But the angel says to the women, “Fear not, I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, just as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.”

In other words, “Fear not, for I know you were expecting to exercise the rituals of death, but the Lord has planned for you to begin exercising the unfettered joy of resurrected life. Jesus has done exactly what he said he would do. You can come and see for yourself that His resurrection is true; His word is true. And that means He as your Christ, as your Messiah, as the one sent by God to atone for sins – is trustworthy and true. And that means you need not fear or be startled over this situation, but all the more you need not fear angels will bring message of God's vengeance, news of impending divine punishment, or word of your condemnation.”

Friends, Christ is such a perfect and sufficient atoning sacrifice that the firstfruits of the new creation make themselves evident just three short days after the work “is finished” and the new covenant is sealed. And, though that transition from new covenant anticipated to new creation firstfruits unveiled was just as quiet, just as surreal, as this morning’s Easter observance, nevertheless, the one empty grave quietly guarantees every grave will one day stand empty. And, when those graves stand empty and all the nations 02 him, and those who are risen in Him will live with Him. And that means, *you*, dear baptized child of God, you have every reason to “fear not.”

“Fear not” – have no fear, for Christ is risen. If death is conquered, what is there to fear? Ironically, the nations who scoff at us Christians for our faith, the unbelievers who put all their hopes in their own strength, this day sit in the isolation of their homes in abject fear of the unknown, daily reminded that they are not in control. But, you, and the whole Church on earth with you, you have no reason to fear (remember, my very first email to you when this pandemic struck our land and the mandated shelter-in-place gripped our community... the first word I shared with you included a gentle pastoral reminder that – apart from fearing and revering God – “fear” is always sinful... the sheep have nothing to fear when they have the Good Shepherd and Bishop of their souls). Indeed, the Church is not separated from each other today by *fear*, and the

church doors are not closed because of *anxiety*; our motive is not desperation, but honor and respect for the governing authorities and love for our neighbor's body. But, we sit in isolation far different than the rest of the world, for the rest of the world fears the unknown and tells us to remain apart until man can feel in control again. But, Jesus tells his Church, "Fear not. I am in control. In control over the grave itself. In control over your neighbor's body. In control over the governing authorities. So, you have no reason to fear, for neither death nor hell may harm you."

Of course, in our suddenly tactile-aware society, folks will point out that Jesus tells Mary Magdalene (in John's account of the resurrection) , "Do not touch me!" Yes, considering our situation, it's almost comic relief... "Do not touch me!" – not out of fear or isolation, for our Christ is Lord over death itself... but rather, "Do not cling to me; do not try to hold on to me, for I look to the ascension to come."

Notice, Jesus – even from the very morning of His resurrection – views that resurrection in relation to *the ascension*... not because "he has more work to do," but because His glory draws nigh. His resurrection is not "the end," but only "the beginning" ... the beginning of a new creation over which He has all authority, indeed over which He as the victorious Lamb has the keys to its Book of Life. Jesus' resurrection brings visual evidence and fulfillment to all the hope and promises regarding the Lord's Christ, but it also gives birth

to the anticipation of His ascent into glory and the never-ending feast of victory.

And that means, though we cannot be together for Easter, we can eagerly look forward to his Ascension. I know many of us hope to be back to work, back to the daily routine by Ascension Day... and I know that, in certain European nations, the bells *always* toll on Ascension Day, even though people have no intention on filling the sanctuaries in faith... but I hope you will eagerly look forward to and consider the importance of that Thursday, the importance of that 40th day after Jesus' resurrection; even if you're back to work, back to the daily routine, be there at his altar that evening... for then, we will realize anew that the first Easter morning was quiet and almost slipped by without anyone's notice, while the day of his Ascension was glorious! The first Easter morning was marked in isolation, his disciples in no way gathered around the tomb; but his Ascension was marked with joy and wonder and awe, as His disciples gathered on the holy mount and watched him ascend to His throne.

So do not cling to the sad 'emptiness' and lack of festivity of this Easter morning, but eagerly anticipate and look forward to the opportunity to rejoice and together glory in *His* glory, confess His ascension, and partake of the risen body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ... for his quiet resurrection once ushered in the thundering acclamations of an eternity of joyful praise.

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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