

“... just as He told you.”

Mark 16:1-8

The Resurrection of Our Lord

April 4, 2021

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 alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.”*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Had the women been confident in Christ’s pre-crucifixion teaching, would they have brought spices to the tomb with them? By that, I don’t mean to chastise the women, as if you and I wouldn’t do exactly the same thing! Nor does Jesus chastise the woman who, at the house of Simon in Bethany, in the days before Jesus’ death, anointed his head with oil as one preparing him for his burial. The point of the question is to simply ask: Going to the tomb with burial ointments – is that a sign that the women expected the resurrection? Or is it a sign they had resigned themselves to Jesus’ demise? I tend to think we’d all interpret it as a sign of the latter... and yet, we’d all do exactly the same thing. When confronted with the sobering reality of a death that has all the fingerprints of finality to it, would we hold our breath and hold out hope for anything other than what humanity has always known? Or, would we resign ourselves to the likelihood our hopes had been in vain and, despite

our confusion, this meaningless world and our meaningless life go on until swallowed up in death?

Perhaps this is why we don't need St Mark's account of the resurrection of our Lord to have a neat and tidy happy ending. It's okay that the scene ends with the women in fear and shock, not comprehending what they have just seen and heard. Hasn't Mark's entire recording of the life of Christ up to this point repeatedly been about signs and wonders that must be believed precisely because they overwhelm the mind and senses? Mark's gospel has continuously highlighted the *power* of Jesus (power, not in fitness and strength, but in "super-rational" – beyond rational – divine ability)... the *divine* work of Jesus to silence and cast out demons, heal the sick, tame the winds and waves... and now, in laying down his own life and taking it up again, to break the back of death itself. And, where that power is on display, do we really expect people to anticipate it or to react with anything less than how the women react?: "They went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

That is the rational reaction of those who have just been audience to something beyond reason, isn't it? Not *against* reason, not *illogical*, of which one could level-headedly and calmly refute the logic (2+2 isn't 5, and a boy isn't a girl... that irrationality can calmly be refuted)... but the words of resurrection from the dead are

*beyond* reason (“*could* it ever be?”)...and so, the women’s reaction is reasonable: “trembling and astonishment had seized them” and, again “they were afraid.”

The word for astonishment is helpful (εχστασις) because it reminds us that their trembling and fear was not from a terror or, if you will, a fearing for their life and safety. They were ecstatic at the news, but completely befuddled and bewildered by such a thought, so that it brought fear to even try to consider what this would mean... would you dare speak to anyone if the news were so unbelievable that you wouldn’t even know how to explain it? Or would you be afraid that you couldn’t possibly have seen/heard it correctly and so would be reporting something that would later sound absurd and silly, and you’d ruin your entire reputation.

Perhaps this is why the women are so frightened... nothing rational can explain this. There’s nothing within human reason that could prepare them for this. The power of God in the resurrection of Jesus brings the supernatural into daily life and brings daily life into the supernatural. And, that is not something rationalistic minds are prepared to weigh and calculate.

In fact, let’s be honest, that’s perhaps why you don’t share the news of the resurrection as unfettered joy ecstatically does, isn’t it? Because the rationalists of this age will laugh in your face as one who believes silly myths. *You* know that *they* know that such news flies in the face of their rationalism... they consider it *against*

logic because they don't believe there's *anything* that can verifiably extend *beyond* logic. And so (we say to ourselves), I'll shout "Christ is risen" among those who will rejoice with me in the good news, but I'll keep a very tight lip around those who would find my reasoning to go against that perfectly "sound" logic that celebrates those "perfectly logical, scientific things" like – say – transgenderism and gender fluidity!

But, even if they *were* actually consistent in their appeal to rationalism and scientific conclusions... no amount of scientific reasoning is ever going to be able to expand science into the realm of the supernatural (and what does the term "supernatural" mean?... does it mean "mythical"? No... it means "the truth beyond what is natural to *fallen* man). No scientific reasoning is ever going to be able to yield a vaccine that leads to the resurrection of the dead or the life everlasting. Only the power of God can yield such benefit.

Nevertheless, because the power of God in the person of Christ took to the cross and burst from the tomb, you may always—before friend or foe – confess the historic truth that Christ is risen even if such truth goes beyond logic. For, the Word of that resurrection is not a powerless rationalism of which to persuade or convince the skeptic. Rather, it is the Word of God Most High, the Word of the Word made flesh, with the same power as was on display in the earthly work of Christ over demons, winds and waves,

illness, death itself... and, yes, even power to bring faith to the heart as the powerful Word is brought to the ears.

In fact, that description of the women trembling (*τρομος*) and in fear (*φοβω*) is heard multiple times after the resurrection of Jesus... in occasions having to do with the power of the Word to bring salvation.

To the Corinthians, Paul writes that he had preached that wisdom of the cross (that “folly to those who are perishing, but the power of God to those who are being saved”)... Paul says, he preached Christ crucified “in fear and trembling” before Jews incensed by such good news. But, as Paul says, he could stand against them because what he preached was not the wisdom of man, but the *power* of God.

Again, to the Philippians, Paul exhorts them to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you.” Notice what Paul is saying: he doesn’t mean, “you figure it out...” He means, “there is fear and trembling in realizing salvation depends on the supernatural, on the power of God working in you and overcoming the power of darkness.”

Salvation is not dependent on the rationalism of human wisdom. Salvation is not about making my calculation of whether I think Jesus is believable. Salvation is about the divine power to make the sinner an entirely new creation... to no longer count his sin against him... that sin that itself had so much supernatural power

that it quite literally changed all of natural history and tore mankind right out of the image of God and into man's own fallen likeness.

Perhaps this is why we have so little belief in the power of sin... having been born into the slavery of its power, it is so natural and logical and rational to us. And thus, we naturally rationalize away the power of sin, and – with it – the usefulness of the Holy Law... we minimize its import into our daily lives, we underestimate the eternal weight of our guilt. We underappreciate the combat stupendous between the powers of hell and the powers of heaven, a combat Christ himself stepped into the middle of and silenced, terminated, conquered with the power of his innocent suffering and death and the richness of his holy precious blood.

That is such a powerful combat and a “beyond nature” victory that its firstfruits on Easter morning leave the women astonished, fearful and trembling. That's what salvation does and is... the news of the sin-stained cross and the empty tomb and the power of God in my place upon that cross and emanating from (coming forth in risen flesh-and-blood from) that empty tomb to proclaim that history-altering, mind-boggling, heaven-invading-earth victory in that combat stupendous... the result of which (when the dust settles): the Prince of Life reigns immortal!

In fact, ironically to human reason, but quite fitting to the Scriptural record, those who first experienced and knew the manifest reality of the power of God were the inhabitants of hell – the devil,

his legions, and all powers of evil. Recall that the term “gospel” is a term of “battlefield” origins... a report of victory in the battle. As such, way back in Eden, the first recipient/audience of that prevailing was the enemy himself. To the devil, the Lord declared regarding His Christ, “He will crush your head; you shall crush his heel” – the most powerful of victories through the most painful of sufferings. Now, when “it is finished” and this gospel comes to pass, it is again the powers of hell that are first to endure the reverberation of the power of God unto salvation... for, even in death, the Christ descended to hell to report that that gospel *promise* had now become the gospel *truth*... and the powers of hell were sent reeling by the power of God unto salvation in the person of Jesus storming hell’s gates even before rising again to share the gospel declaration with those on earth.

And, if Christ can declare his victory before the dead who did not believe in him, he also can declare his victory before the dead who believed on his name. In other words, this Easter hope is not only for the faithful who survived Covid, but also for the faithful who succumbed to Covid... for, by the power of God and the merit of Christ, the grave no longer has finality. While we thank God for the noble efforts and the godly gifts of science, man’s reasoned and logical defenses against this pandemic pale in comparison with the Good News that will one day leave it – and every pandemic that ever took lives from the earth, even the Black Plague – the Good News of

Christ will one day leave them all a single, forgotten footnote of history: Death is swallowed up in victory. In fact, in that same letter to the Philippians we cited earlier, Paul writes that Christ “will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the *power* (there’s that ‘beyond-human-reason’ word again)... by the *power* that enables him to subject all things to himself.”

And, “therefore, my brothers,” Paul continues, “stand firm thus in the Lord.” Do not fear and tremble in unbelief at such wondrous news... be not ecstatic with astonishment that the Lord could actually keep his Word and promise. Rather, believe the good news – Christ is risen.... “just as he told you,” the angel reminded the women. And, having all of life defined by the reliability of that good news, you can live calmly, confidently, boldly, with firm expectation in every promise God has ever made to you in the power of His Holy Word, and you can assert the supernatural and risk your whole life and being on it: “It is just as he told me,” you may plead.

Why do you bring your children to be baptized? Isn’t it because we have reason to be defiant in the face of unbelief... defiant in the face of philosophical rationalism... defiant in the face of death itself? We come with our children and we bring them to the waters of baptism, and God adopts them and there makes them His own, and thereafter we teach them to look with eager anticipation for the promised resurrection... all because it is just as he told you.

Why do you voluntarily attend and sit through 20-minute sermons and 60-minute Bible Studies, that teach you nothing of the practical questions of life – taxes, gardening tips, retirement strategies, healthy eating, car repair – but are constantly pointing you to the supernatural... why? Because “it is just as he told you.”

Why do you humble yourself and bow before what the rationalistic world sees as empty wood and cold brass, and why do you even consider a crumb of bread and sip of wine to be the feast of heaven, that you would crawl over glass to come and receive, if not because the God who invaded human history to atone for your sins has promised, by that same power, to come to His altar and serve his people and sustain them unto that unfathomable resurrection and life everlasting... and “it is just as he told you.”

Thus, not in the fear and trembling of rationalistic unbelief, but in the fear and trembling of faith that recognizes that – what only the Word and power of the God of heaven could do – *has been done*. Sin is vanquished. Death is conquered. Christ is risen... just as he told you.

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