

Mark 16:1-8  
The Resurrection of Our Lord  
March 31, 2024

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

Our text, the Gospel reading, as it culminates with these words: “And [the angel] said to them, ‘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...’ And 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.”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Whenever our Easter Festival employs this Gospel reading that ends in the women running from the tomb in fear, we anticipate (and rightly so) a sermon that may differentiate fear from faith. And, as the theme of the day is the resurrection, usually the sermon may be described in a single statement as, “Do not be afraid of death, for Christ has overcome the grave.” That is a true doctrinal statement. However, it is not in keeping with our text.

The women weren’t afraid of death, but they *were* afraid. So then, the question arises, “Of what were they afraid?” Quickly, we respond, “They were afraid of the angel!” True. “They were afraid of the supernatural surprising them!” True. “They were afraid of the empty grave.” Also true.

But, that all only touches on the deeper, more fundamental issue: They were afraid to live a life bold to depend upon the promises and Word of God, which – prevailing over all human logic – had delivered on exactly what it had promised, and it had promised exactly what they were now seeing and hearing. They had been promised a Messiah who would die and rise again; they had been promised a three-day grief followed by reason for inexpressible joy; they had been promised that the Lord’s tomb would be empty, ‘just as He said.’ Yet, in the face of it all, they were afraid to believe the promises could actually be true. In short, they were not afraid to *die*; they were afraid to *live*. They were not afraid to *die in the shadows of the fallen creation*; they were afraid to *live in the dawn of the new creation*. Even regards God’s Word, they were not afraid to *die* according to God’s Word; they were shocked, afraid to *live* according to God’s Word.

Fundamentally, this is our issue as well. To be sure, we will walk through daily life confessing Jesus as Lord and preparing for the inevitable grave. But, when confronted with the truth of the resurrection, perhaps confronted by others who doubt its veracity... confronted as to whether we will actually stake our reputation and hope on the truth of the resurrection being historic and not just divinely mythological, we start to squirm. Could it really be true? Not just Scripturally, religiously true... but

*really* true? And, if it is, is that worth risking our life's hopes on? Our life's reputation on? Or, to play it safe, should we just go along with the world and live knowing we're going to die?

We often speak of – and are right to speak of – the resurrection vindicating us; but, foremost, it vindicates God... it vindicates the promises of God... it vindicates every last Word of God that He has revealed to us in Christ Jesus and the sacred writings that point to that same Christ Jesus.

That means, for example, that the resurrection of Christ vindicates *everything* promised and spoken by God. It vindicates His Word and all that Word gives – namely, His Ten Commandments, His invitation to pray and know He will hear you, and His sacramental gifts and the forgiveness of sins given therein. It vindicates His Word regarding the creation's beginning and His Word regarding the creation's end. It vindicates His mercy, and it vindicates His holiness. Indeed, it vindicates *everything* He has said and given not only for the life of the world to come, but also for life in this world.

Thus, you who have been baptized into Christ's death, you have a choice! You can – with the faithless world – live daily life as if God's word is *uncertain*; or you can live daily life admitting God's Word is certain. You can live denying the truth, or you can live admitting the truth. You can live ashamed of the truth, or you

can live proud of the truth. But you cannot live with one foot in each camp. You cannot say, “Christ is risen... maybe. And, in case He is, I’ll believe it... but, in case He’s not, I’ll live according to the world’s unbelief and its fatalism that we eat and drink, and tomorrow we die.”

Why are we afraid to *truly* live? ...To live according to God’s holiness, to live confident in His plans and promises for the baptized, to live knowing the cross of Christ has changed the fate of all of human history, and the resurrection has begun a new creation? Why are we afraid to live according to the tangible, life-defining truth of God at work in realtime – meaning, we live not ‘as if’ the forgiveness of sins is ceremonially our lifeline from the cross, but we live *because* the forgiveness of sins is sacramentally our lifeline from the cross! And, therefore why are we afraid to live with a clear conscience before God and with a clear and proud conscience before the unbeliever, to live certain of our own resurrection? Why is any of that in doubt, when Christ’s tomb stands empty?

We are tempted to live all our daily lives clinging to the things the *world* says are certain; after all, it’s all we *see* in the fallen world around us. And yet, everything it promises, everything it glories in, everything it says you can stake your life on and commit your life to and live your life in pursuit of... it all

ends in despair, death, and decay. And, thus, the ancient saying goes, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” And the modern version goes, “the only certain things in life are death and taxes.” Yes, death for you, taxes to pay forward the empty promises of this governed life onto another generation hurrying itself toward death and the grave. Yes, death and taxes are most truly certain. But even more certain is the resurrection, for – in Christ Jesus – the resurrection *has* overcome death and has been *eyewitnessed* to overcome death... and if both taxes and death are only for this life, then they are both swallowed up in the resurrection and the life, He who is Jesus Christ the righteous, who – in His glorious body – will also give the life of the world to come to your mortal body.

In other words, the world lives as if sin and death and decay are “normal”; you may live knowing that life and resurrection are the *new* normal. Life and resurrection are the ‘in fact’ that renders ‘null and void’ all facts that limit ‘life’ to this gloom-and-doom world.

How does St Paul say it in verses just after our epistle reading?: “If Christ is not raised, we are of all men to be most pitied because we have followed a lie. But, *in fact*.” Not a figure of speech, as if “But, in fact” means “But, ya know... but, I say... but, as I figure it.” No, it is an appeal to truth, “But, *in fact*, in *truth*, in

*undeniable certainty.*” Indeed, in the Greek, it more expressly says, “But *now*, Christ is risen from the dead.” *Now*, as in a way that it wasn’t formerly so, we *now* live in a new age marked by his resurrection... this is undeniably certain!, Paul says.

And, if *undeniably* certain, then we Christians ought not live, think, or confess as if Christ’s resurrection is *unreliably* mythical. That *is* the temptation, isn’t it? That the world says to you, “Sure, you go ahead and think that. Yes, for *you*, Christ is risen, if that makes you feel better.” They interpret it as a psychotherapy, a mythology.

To be honest, our Old Testament reading may *sound* a little bit like mythology:

“On this holy mountain, the Lord will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.... He will swallow up death forever.”

We read that text at every funeral, and the grieving unbeliever may say, “Yeah, sure, if that’s the story you want to tell...” For them, it’s a Christianized Mt Olympus. And, maybe we’ll shrug and deflect because we’re afraid to *live* in the truth of God’s promises... to live in the fulfilled promises of Christ Jesus, who even and already now pours out His feast to His people on His holy mountain.

No, this is no Mt Olympus. This is no mythology just to make you feel better. It is a “but, in fact” reality on account of Christ’s victory and resurrection... a reality you will one day know by sight, but which is already yours – even this very hour – by the promises of God in Christ Jesus. How does the letter to the Hebrews say it? “You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God... to angels in festal gathering (meaning, gathered for the feast)... to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant.” Sounds like the Lord’s Supper, doesn’t it? You may boldly live in that sacramental reality already now!

Yes, the disciples may have witnessed Jesus on a holy mountain and been eyewitness of His majesty in the Transfiguration, and there seen and heard the spectacle by which they knew him to be the Son of God... but that was *before* the crucifixion and resurrection; that was *before* the “It is finished.” You have something *more* sure, the apostle says (the apostle who was on that holy mountain). The completed cross; the empty tomb; the Word made sure as it now shines with the news of the resurrection, shines as a lamp shining in a dark place.

Now, there is one more facet to this that must be considered on this most joyous day. While we are right to rejoice that the resurrection vindicates our hope and our God, we ought never lose sight of the fact that faith in Christ means that,

technically speaking, the resurrection is not the gospel, for *all* flesh shall be raised... even the wicked. The hope that the resurrection vindicates has its substance in the cross; the cross is the gospel. *There* is where Jesus saves. What benefit is resurrection unto condemnation? No, in Christ crucified resurrection is unto eternal life. “God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him may not *perish*” (meaning ‘death everlasting’ – yes, a resurrection unto death everlasting)... that whoever believes in Him may not be raised unto death everlasting but “may have life everlasting.”

“I am the resurrection *and the life*. Whoever believes in me, *though he die*, yet shall he live. And whoever lives and believes in me shall not die (the second death) in the eternal age.” – And if that’s true regarding your *life* after the resurrection (as opposed to *death* after the resurrection)... if that’s true regarding your life *after* the resurrection, it’s also true of your life *before* the resurrection. Jesus’ resurrection gives more to you than just your own resurrection. His resurrection gives your daily life in this broken world marching toward the grave... His resurrection gives your daily life meaning, hope, purpose, and certainty as you live *for* and *in anticipation of* the life of the world to come.... indeed, already now by faith, you live in that *inheritance* of the life of the world to come.



So, dear Christian, fear not the truth of the resurrection. Be bold to live with joy in all of God's gifts vindicated by Christ's resurrection... Be bold to live with joy in the sacramental life Christ gives His Church... And yet, that sacramental life is no mere 'spiritual' life; be bold to live with joy in the baptismal life as it pertains to the body and daily life— even as it stares down illness, death, the grave, and decay. Yes, live with faithful joy in the vocations (love your vocations and the neighbors you serve in your vocations!), daily bread, and protection God provides, and with faithful joy in the future for both body and soul... a future which is not defined by a return to the dust, but by your own coming resurrection, already proven by its firstfruits in Christ Jesus.

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

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