

Mark 16:1-8 – “He is Risen, Indeed!”

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“*He is risen!*” He is risen indeed! Alleluia! The first part of this common greeting among God’s people on Easter morning comes from the Angel’s words in our Gospel reading from Mark, when He told the women who were looking for Jesus’ dead body in the tomb: “*He has risen!*” But the women were not quite ready to respond, “He has risen, indeed!” Instead, “*trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.*” But we know from elsewhere in the Gospels that these women were only temporarily speechless, perhaps not speaking about what they saw and heard to anyone as they fled back to where the other disciples of Christ were hiding. There was certainly a strong element of fear, confusion and seclusion among Jesus’ disciples after His crucifixion, and even (for a short time) after His resurrection, as they tried to process these mind boggling events.

That’s one of the things fear and uncertainty can do to us, they can cause us to keep to ourselves even when it comes to sharing something like the Good News of Jesus’ resurrection. We may be concerned about what others may think of us, or how they may react, especially when we share with them Jesus’ words, “*I AM the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*” (John 14:6). That sounds too much like hate language toward other faiths, especially in our day and age. Even though we’re not going to attack people if they don’t believe what God’s Word says, some people still avoid us like the plague when they know we believe that salvation is through Jesus Christ alone. And we are fast approaching a time in the U.S. when people are not simply going to avoid us, but they are going to try to cancel or silence our proclamation of God’s Word.

Unfortunately, we tend to do the same thing when it comes to other religious groups who feel strongly about their faith. But avoiding others, especially those who believe differently, is what Satan would like us to do, not God. God has brought people of many different faiths to this country not so that we can keep to ourselves, but so that we can share with them the Good News that the Son of God became a man so that He could suffer His judgement against the sins of all people through His death in our place. Equally important is Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, to assure us of His power to do the same for us. Through this Good News the Holy Spirit works to raise sinners, like us, from unbelief to faith—from death to life. That’s why it’s so important to proclaim this Good News.

So how does God overcome our fears and uncertainties when it comes to sharing this Spirit empowered Good News with others? Through regular nourishment from the same Word of God—the Bread of Life—Jesus Christ (John 6:25ff), who has indeed risen from the dead and is here today through His Word and Sacrament to feed and strengthen us. The more we hear about all that our Lord has done and promises in both the Old and NT, the more the Holy Spirit strengthens our faith in God’s promises, resulting in so much inner peace and joy that we can’t help sharing it with others, no matter what the cost.

This is what eventually happened to Jesus’ first disciples as God, through His Word, helped them to connect the dots between all that God promised in the OT and how Jesus fulfills those promises. That’s why St. Paul says in our Epistle reading: “*I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures [referring to the OT Scriptures], that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.”*

Where does the OT Scriptures speak of Jesus' death and resurrection? Take Psalm 22 for example, which Jesus Himself referred us to from the cross when He said, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.*"

These words not only tell us of the hell that Jesus went through by taking our sins upon Himself, but they're also the opening words to Psalm 22 and are therefore meant to refer us to the rest of what is prophesied in this Psalm. For it not only speaks clearly of Jesus' death, saying for example that both His hands and feet would be pierced and that He would be laid in "*the dust of death,*" but it also speaks of His resurrection saying, "*You have rescued me!...I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you!*" He's doing that right now through you and me.

But that's not all our Savior does in the midst of the congregation. He also promises in this Psalm to fulfill His vows to "*those who fear him. The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied!*" These words are fulfilled this morning as Jesus Christ feeds us with His crucified and risen body and blood through His Word and the Lord's Supper.

Here again, the OT is not silent regarding the benefits of this great gift. Take for example the mention of the blood of the lamb in both the Old and NT, together with something as obscure as a hyssop plant. During the days of the Exodus, when God delivered His people from Egypt, Moses told the people to take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood of the lamb (which they killed earlier for food), and to then touch it on the doorposts of their homes (Exodus 12:22ff). When the angel of death passed through Egypt, He would see the blood of the lamb and passover their homes, delivering their first born sons from death, and eventually all of them from slavery in Egypt.

Likewise, even though the people at Jesus' crucifixion were not aware of how they were fulfilling the OT Scriptures, it was no coincidence that they used a hyssop plant to raise a sponge dipped in sour wine to Jesus' mouth (John 19:29). The hyssop plant reminds us of the blood of the lamb smeared on the doorposts, which corresponds to the blood of Christ shed on the cross. And the sponge dipped in the wine and lifted up on the hyssop plant also brings to mind the Lord's Supper and Jesus' words when He took bread and wine and said, "*This is my Body...this is my blood. Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins*" (Matthew 26:26-28). Through this Sacrament Jesus touches the doorposts of our hearts with His blood (the blood of the Lamb of God) to deliver us from our slavery to sin, death and the devil, and give us eternal life.

I could go on all day, but I don't want to keep you from sharing your Easter joy with others beyond these walls. So, instead of trying to give you enough nourishment to last until next Easter, I pray that the Lord will bring you back to His Word every day of the week, and especially on Sundays, where He continues to not only nourish and strengthen your faith, cast out your fears, and richly bless you, but to also work through you like He did the hyssop plant to be a blessing to others; so that they too may rejoice in the Good News that, "*He has risen,*" by responding: He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

All glory be to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

[Children's Sermon] Jesus' resurrection from the dead was not something His disciples were expecting. But because Jesus did rise from the dead, He shows us that He has the power to answer our prayers to save us from all that bad things in us and around that try to hurt us. So now, instead of expecting things to get worse, we can look forward to things getting better. We can look forward to going to heaven when we die, because of our faith in Jesus, who got rid of our sins and death through His death and resurrection.

To help you remember this Good News and share it with others, I have another walnut shell for you this year. What do you usually expect to find in a walnut shell? A walnut. But in these walnuts there is something unexpected. [Crack open cross filled walnut]. May this cross help to remind you that Jesus died to set us free from our sins, as well as the Good News that "*He has risen!*" He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!