

Sermon Sunday of the Resurrection 2018

April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018

Mark 16:1-8

Allelulia, Christ is Risen!

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the words of the Gospel, especially the angel's words who says, "**He has risen.**"

**He has risen; he is not here.** Can you imagine the shock Mary Magdalene and the other Mary had? Here they are in great grief, they are expecting to come to the tomb and find their Lord's body in that tomb so that they can prepare it for burial properly, and then they go, and there is no body. It's gone. That would be hard enough to process on its own, but then imagine the shock when they see the angel and he tells them it's not just that the body's gone—it hasn't been stolen, it's not just missing, no—no it's been raised. Raised from the dead. Raised from the dead? That doesn't happen. People don't just come out of their graves. That's not the way things go, is it?

And yet here they are, there at the tomb outside of Jerusalem. There, looking at the rock where His body was laid and it is empty. There is the stone covering the tomb no more—the very stone they were worried about moving and it had already been moved. If you've ever experienced shocking news, you can start to relate. Of course, most often our shocking news is negative, and this isn't. This is the best possible news. Jesus isn't dead. He was, He was crucified. But now He's alive. He is risen, He is not there. In fact, He's going to meet the disciples in Galilee.

You can imagine the thoughts sprinting through their minds as they're walking back, or maybe running, fleeing as Mark tells us. You can imagine the million questions that were flying through their minds. And being the good Lutherans they were, I am sure one of them was thinking the Hebrew question from Passover, "*Mah Z'oth,*" *Was ist das?* What does this mean?

And this is exactly what we should ask too. What does this mean? What does this resurrection mean for the Church? What does it mean for you as a Christian living in Illinois two thousand years after that occurrence?

Well in short, it means a lot, doesn't it? It means far more than we can understand or imagine—an infinitude of things to consider. But today, I'd like to talk about three things. First of all it means that in our day when the faith is under attack you have something that you can point to that's concrete. Have you ever considered that, that pretty much all other religions are based on something that is sort of pie in the sky? Sure, they're maybe based on some moment of revelation or enlightenment, but those

are things that are not verifiable outside of the mind of the prophet, are they? For example, Buddhism is based on personal enlightenment, Nirvana. That's not verifiable outside of the mind of the Buddha. Or in something more homegrown, the revelation of the Book of Mormon—since the golden plates have been lost, their supposed translation was left as something only found in the mind of Joseph Smith. But look at Christianity. Look at what it's based on, the life of Jesus Christ, God entering into this world in the concrete body of a man, living life in that body, being crucified under Pontius Pilate—a historically verified figure by the way—and raised again on the first Easter. This is all concrete and happened in time, in space, here on this planet. It's not just in the minds of prophets.

Now as I say this, I know there are a lot of people who will try to tell us that we can't historically verify this. Well, inasmuch as we can verify anything in the ancient world we can. The reason why they say we can't is because they say we can't consider the Bible an accurate accounting. They say it was written with the agenda to prove that it happened so it is unreliable. But if I write something to prove an occurrence, does that inherently make it false? No! In fact a whole lot of scholars think that Paul really wrote what we heard this morning—and to be clear as the Church we certainly confess that he did and that he did so under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. But hear what he has to say about the resurrection.

**“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.”** Did you hear what he said? Christ was raised—just like the Old Testament said He would be—He was raised, and then He appeared to Cephas, to Peter, then the twelve, then to *more than five hundred brothers, most of whom are still alive*. Jesus appeared to five hundred people after He rose. Five hundred! That's a lot of witnesses. And when Paul wrote this he said, **“most of whom are still alive.”** In other words, he's telling people, “If you don't believe me go ask the people that saw Him!” In fact, he also points out something else that's strong evidence for the resurrection. Jesus appeared to James. James is called the brother of Jesus, and in the Gospels he's not mentioned. He's not mentioned because he didn't believe. What happened? Jesus was raised from the dead, and James changed his tune. In fact, not only did James change his tune but all of the disciples did. They all went from being afraid, to even being willing to die for the faith.

Christians, this is evidence that what we believe is true. So, first the resurrection means that you have something concrete to point to in relation to clinging to and defending your faith.

Second, this means freedom. Freedom from what? Freedom from the bondage to sin and all its consequences. Paul referenced it when he spoke in what we just heard about Christ dying for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures. We hear him say it this way in the letter to the Romans, that Abraham's **"faith was 'counted to him as righteousness.' But the words 'it was counted to him were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification."** In other words, Jesus was raised that you would be justified, forgiven, freed of your sins. That's what the blood shed on the cross won for you and the resurrection is: God's declaration that it's done for you. Freedom. Freedom from sin. Freedom from death. Freedom from the bondage of the devil.

Now as I say that, and we hear Paul say elsewhere that it's for freedom that Christ has set us free, we have to pause there a second and explain what that means. What am I saying in this? What is this freedom? Often when we think of freedom, we think of being able to do whatever we want, right? We say, if I am free, then I get to do whatever I want to do. And in our sin, what we want to do is sin, isn't it? In other words, the sinner in us thinks of freedom as being able to indulge whatever sinful desire I have and there will not be consequence.

Sort of as a sad reflection of this, I am reminded of a performer whose music I enjoy. Well, I was reading about him, and found out that he had been raised in the Church, and in fact had gotten his start in music there. Sadly, however, his dad died, and later while he was doing mission work to the Native Americans out west, he decided that his mission work was actually destructive to what he saw as a beautiful culture resident among those people. In light of that he decided he didn't really believe in what he was doing, in fact didn't really believe in God, and fell from the faith.

Now as a brief comment, I mentioned his dad dying because I am guessing that was pretty influential on his faith—as the life and faith of the father has been statistically shown to be the most important factor in the child's faith when they grow up. However, he also bought into the lie of our time that all cultures are inherently equal. Does this mean that we can't learn something from other cultures? Sure we can. But we also can look at the culture created by Christianity, especially at the generosity it should engender and know there is benefit to it.

So why do I bring all of this up? Because when this man fell from the faith, what ended up happening—if his music is to confess what he believes—he saw the freedom in that as something hedonistic. His sinful nature reflected what each of ours does and he saw freedom as having the opportunity to indulge in whatever sinful pleasures one can find. Of course, he found his freedom in falling from the faith, our freedom is in Christ. But when you hear Paul saying it is for freedom that Christ set you free, what is your first reaction? Our natural inclination is to think this means that we can act however we want as Christians, isn't it? That's what we often think. And that makes the point doesn't it? We see freedom as doing whatever our sinful nature desires. But, that's not freedom, that's only a return to bondage. Christians, you are baptized, you are free in Christ. And that is a true freedom, freedom that has overcome sin, death and then devil. That is the second thing the resurrection tells you.

And the third thing. The resurrection shows us a bodily eternity. When Jesus was raised from the grave, His body was raised. He didn't go and turn into an angel. He didn't turn into a star. He didn't become a ghost. We see Him eating, we see Him drinking. His body was raised, and yours will be too. And if that doesn't sound satisfying, that's because you're thinking of your body as it is now, as it bears the curse of sin with pain and suffering. There it won't have that. Listen to the reading from Isaiah again, **“On this mountain the Lord of hosts 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.”** That sounds like a feast even greater than what we might enjoy later today, doesn't it? Or even than we just enjoyed at our breakfast? It sounds worthwhile. The feast prepared by God! A feast with God, body and soul, face to face with our creator in the New Creation of the New Heavens and the New Earth. Jesus' resurrection was real and it was bodily and yours will be too. Now I could say a lot more about that, and about all three points, but I'm going to stop there. In particular, I'm not saying more on the bodily aspect because I'm going to talk more about it next week with Thomas, but you still see the third point. The resurrection will be bodily.

And so Christians, this is the promise of the resurrection, this what the resurrection means. It means that you have something concrete to trust and believe. It means that you are truly forgiven of your sin, forgiven and freed from it. It means that God cares about your body. Now whether the Marys thought of these things or not, we don't know. Some of them maybe did, others likely not. But no matter what, when we hear those words, we can take them to heart. Alleluia, He is Risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia. Amen.