

**HE HAS RISEN!**  
**Sermon for Easter Sunday, 2021**  
**Mark 16:1-8**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is the Gospel from before, Mark 16:1-8: **When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome bought spices to go and anoint Jesus. <sup>2</sup> On Sunday they were coming to the tomb very early when the sun had just come up. <sup>3</sup> They asked one another, “Who is going to roll away the stone for us from the door of the tomb?”**

**<sup>4</sup> However, when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back, even though it was very large.**

**<sup>5</sup> As they went into the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting at the right side, and they were amazed.**

**<sup>6</sup> He told them, “Do not be amazed any longer! You are looking for Jesus from Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen. He is not here. See the place where He was laid! <sup>7</sup> Go, however, and tell His disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see Him, just as He told you!’”**

**<sup>8</sup> They went out and hurried away from the tomb, because they were trembling and bewildered; and they said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had placed Jesus’ body in the tomb. Nicodemus took with him a mixture of about thirty kilograms of myrrh and aloes<sup>1</sup> in order to anoint the lifeless body of Jesus. Myrrh was a fragrant resin turned into a powder by crushing, while aloes was a powder of crushed sandalwood. Spices were used not to embalm but to mask the smell of decay – although in this instance it was unnecessary because of God’s intervention.<sup>2</sup>

Mark writes, **“When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome bought spices to go and anoint Jesus. <sup>2</sup> On Sunday they were coming to the tomb very early when the sun had just come up.”** Apparently, for the time being, these women had forgotten all about all the prophecies made concerning the resurrection of Christ. They really did think that they would find Jesus’ body out there in the tomb, so they wanted to do what was right. They wanted to bring the spices and anoint Jesus’ body. To anoint the body for its burial in this way was part of the honour bestowed upon it by loving friends. So, if Jesus could not live, at least He should die with honour and respect as a great teacher.

As these women went out to the tomb, one thing was troubling them. **“Who is going to roll away the stone for us from the door of the tomb?”** But the stone was not all they had to worry about. A guard of soldiers had been stationed in front of the tomb. The Apostle Matthew writes, *“The chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate <sup>63</sup> and said, “Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while He was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise.’ <sup>64</sup> Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples go and steal Him away and tell the people, ‘He has risen from the dead,’ and the last fraud will be worse than the first.” <sup>65</sup> Pilate said to them, “You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can.” <sup>66</sup> So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard”* (Matt. 27:62-66).

Jesus had been laid to rest on Friday evening. The next day, Saturday, was the Sabbath. Isn’t it ironic then that the chief priests, those who demanded the Sabbath day be kept in its entirety, were now not going to let the Sabbath regulations prevent them from working overtime? How hypocritical! And isn’t it further ironic that they must have remembered what the women and disciples had forgotten - that He would rise again. Did the chief priests honestly think that Jesus’ disciples, now scattered and shocked at what had happened, would be able to regroup so quickly, so as to come and steal the body away? The shock of Jesus’ death had paralysed the disciples. They were just beginning the grieving process and were physically and emotionally incapable of carrying out the plot the Pharisees had feared.

<sup>1</sup> John 19:39

<sup>2</sup> cf Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:31

The fears of Jesus' enemies were very powerful. It is telling that they could not simply forget about Jesus now that He was dead and buried. They were obsessed with the Man they hated, and maybe, just maybe, it was true what He had said: He would rise again.<sup>3</sup> They could not let Him be right, and they wrong.

By sealing the stone and posting a guard, the chief priests did all they could to make themselves look ridiculous on Easter Sunday. The very thing they had tried so hard to prevent was the possibility that Jesus' disciples might come and steal His body. So when it was clear to all that the tomb was empty, what did the chief priests bribe their guards to say? "*His disciples came by night and stole Him while we (the guards) were sleeping!*" (Matt. 28:13). How could anyone take such nonsense seriously?

Anyhow, as the women went out to the tomb early that Sunday morning, the only thing on their minds was "**Who is going to roll away the stone for us from the door of the tomb?**" Their Lord was gone forever. That's what they thought. Their journey to the grave must have been long and lonely. All of the talk about Jesus as the Messiah seemed cold and dead on their lips.

We all fight this battle with death. Sometimes the battle seems to be going well. We're healthy, our children are doing okay, and harvest season is almost over. God is gracious, and there is much to rejoice about. Other times, though, it seems as though death and Satan are winning. A loved one dies. There's a sickness that just won't go away. You've run out of money. You've lost your job. The children are in trouble at school or abroad. There is fighting at home. Sometimes the fight is long and the battle hard. Sometimes this earthly strife that we all undergo never seems to end, and it can feel as though there is no future, no hope for things to ever get better.

But we are not the first Christians to ever have this battle with Satan and sin and death. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15 about those who weren't certain of the resurrection of the dead. They didn't know whether the dead would rise. They had the thought that a person lived and then he died, and that was the end. To that fear and concern, Paul wrote: "*If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all other people*" (1 Corinthians 15:19).

Often, we make our own lives miserable because we have forgotten the most basic, fundamental core of the Christian faith. We live our lives as if Jesus' dead body is still outside of Jerusalem somewhere. When we allow the trials and crosses of this life to define us, to get the better of us, then it is as if we are asking that question with the women at the tomb. Of course, we don't mean that we should always be happy or that if we simply have a more positive attitude, then things will automatically get better. There are times when things *are* hard. We do suffer in this life, and that suffering is real, it is painful, and it may feel as though it will never end. *But Jesus Christ is not dead. He has risen.* And for poor, weak sinners like you and I, that is good news indeed. No, it is the very best of news. We read in our Introit before, "*For You will not abandon My soul to Sheol, or allow Your Faithful One to see decay.*"<sup>11</sup> *You make known to Me the path of life. In Your presence there is fullness of joy. At Your right hand there are pleasures for ever*" (Psalm 16:10-11).

The path that we walk this day is the path of life through death. There is no such thing as life for us apart from Jesus' death and resurrection. But with Christ, there is hope. This hope is not a pie-in-the-sky sort of everything-will-get-better hope. No, God the Father has founded this hope upon Jesus' death and resurrection for us. David prayed again in Psalm 16:2, "*I have been saying to the LORD: "You are my Lord. Without You I have nothing good."*"

But what if anyone believes that this path is not for them? What if someone believes that Jesus' death and resurrection are not enough or that he is not worthy of God? Well, remember St. Paul. We heard him say in our Second Reading today that Jesus "*appeared to James, and then to all the apostles,*"<sup>8</sup> *and, last of all, He appeared to me also, as to someone abnormally born.*"<sup>9</sup> *For I am the least of the apostles, and I do not deserve to be called an apostle, because I had been persecuting the church of God*" (1 Cor. 15:7-9).

Paul shared a list of eyewitnesses who could attest to the fact of Jesus' resurrection, which is the foundation of the Gospel before mentioning himself. Thus on one important count he was not qualified to be an apostle in the strictest sense: he had not accompanied the other disciples during the three years or so that the Lord Jesus "went in and out" among them. By being "abnormally born," which, according to the Greek used here is a medical term for a "premature birth," Paul had not had the benefit of a full gestation period; he had been thrown into his apostleship in a sudden and

<sup>3</sup> Mark 9:31; Matthew 17:22

<sup>4</sup> Acts 1:21

unexpected fashion. Yet even he - a premature birth, a former persecutor - had been given the privilege of becoming an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ.

Paul considered himself the least of the apostles; indeed, in his epistle to the Ephesians, he had called himself “*the least of all His (the Lord’s) holy people*” (Ephesians 3:8). Paul’s consciousness of personal unworthiness was sharpened by the painful memory of the way he had persecuted the church of God. He acknowledged that he shared responsibility for the murder of the Lord’s disciples.<sup>5</sup> In attacking God’s holy people, he had attacked the Son of God Himself. For that affront to the divine Majesty, he knew he deserved death and eternal condemnation. But instead of condemnation, this chief of sinners had been privileged to receive God’s astounding grace, mercy, and longsuffering love so that he had become the person he was: not only a holy person – a saint, but even an apostle. God had had mercy on him, baptised him, and made him as His own child.

If this is true for Paul, then it is true for us. Everything we have and are, all of the good that we have is from God Himself, who has given Himself for us so that we may have hope. He gives Himself so that we can actually live, not just survive to suffer another day. This is exactly what we say in the catechism when we confess: “*That I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true*” (Small Catechism, Second Article).

Today is a day for us to rejoice this day and be glad. The things of this life that weigh us down will pass. God is at peace with us, and we do not need to be afraid of anything that comes our way. Christ’s death and resurrection have earned eternal life for us. “**Do not be amazed any longer! You are looking for Jesus from Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen. He is not here.**” Jesus has risen, and that is all that really matters in this life. Believe it for the sake of our risen Saviour, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in true faith, unto life everlasting. Amen.

#### PRAYER FOR EASTER

Merciful God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we praise and bless You that in Your infinite love You did not even keep back Your own Son, but offered Him up for our trespasses and raised Him to life for our justification, making Him the first-fruits of those who sleep.

Loving Saviour, Jesus Christ, we thank You for Your triumphant resurrection, by which You have done away with sin and death, and given us a new life, living hope, and an inheritance that cannot decay or spoil or fade away, kept for us in heaven.

Gracious Holy Spirit, we glorify You that by Your grace the message of Easter hope and victory is proclaimed throughout the world, and that through the holy Word and Sacraments all the riches of salvation provided for us by the redeeming work of Jesus are given and assured to us.

Blessed Holy Spirit, empower Your Church to carry the tidings of life into all the world. Bless Your Church and make it both in this congregation and elsewhere, a living fellowship of believers, a communion sharing Your sacred things, a people of living faith and hope, a family active in love and every good work.

Lord of the nations on earth, continue to look in mercy on them, and guide them into ways of justice, order, uprightness, and peace. Look with pity on all who are persecuted and oppressed; all who are martyrs for the Gospel; all who are beset by doubts and temptations; all who are burdened by fears and loneliness; all who are stricken with hunger, sickness, and disease; all who are troubled by the fear of death; and all who are tempted to despair of Your mercy. Let them find joy and hope in Christ’s victory over every human need, and give them the assurance of His eternal peace.

Whether we live or die, we are Yours, O Lord. While we live, guide us with Your grace and truth. When we die, give us the crown of life, so that with the holy angels and all the redeemed we may sing for ever: To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever. Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> Acts 26:10; cf. Acts 9:1

## THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD, EASTER DAY

Isaiah 25:6-9

<sup>6</sup> On this mountain the LORD of hosts will prepare for all peoples a banquet of rich food, a banquet with aged wines, rich foods full of marrow and refined, aged wines. <sup>7</sup> On this mountain He will destroy the surface of the shroud that is covering all peoples and the blanket that has been woven over all nations. <sup>8</sup> He will swallow up death for ever. The Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces and remove the disgrace of His people from the whole earth. For the LORD has spoken. <sup>9</sup> On that day people will say: “Look! This is our God. We have been waiting for Him to save us. This is the LORD, for whom we have been waiting. Let us rejoice and be glad that He has saved us!”

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

<sup>1</sup> My fellow-Christians, I am telling you the Good News that I told you, which you also received and on which you also stand. <sup>2</sup> You are also saved by it if you cling to the Word that I have preached to you, unless you have become believers in vain. <sup>3</sup> For I delivered to you, first of all, what I also received: that Christ died for our sins as the Scriptures said He would, <sup>4</sup> and that He was buried and that He was raised again on the third day as the Scriptures said He would, <sup>5</sup> and that He appeared to Cephas and then to the Twelve. <sup>6</sup> After that, He appeared to more than five hundred Christians at the same time, most of whom are still living, but some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup> Then He appeared to James and then to all the apostles, <sup>8</sup> and, last of all, He appeared to me also, as to someone abnormally born. <sup>9</sup> For I am the least of the apostles and do not deserve to be called an apostle, because I had been persecuting the church of God. <sup>10</sup> However, by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me has not been without effect; but I have worked harder than all the others have — yet not I, but the grace of God, which has been with me. <sup>11</sup> Now, whether I have done it or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you have believed.

Mark 16:1-8

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