

The Festival of St. Mark
29 April, Anno Domini 2018
St. Mark 16:14-20
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

St. Mark is the evangelist who cuts right to the chase. His account of the Gospel of Jesus Christ moves through Jesus' public ministry like a speeding train, rushing as quickly as it possibly can to the end, where it finally slows down when it reaches the climax of all human history - the death and resurrection of God's Son for the salvation of the world. Everything is happening at a break-neck pace. Mark uses the word "immediately" 131 times, beginning with Jesus' baptism. It's as though Mark wants us to get a sense of the urgency of Jesus' ministry, that Jesus is moving with very distinct purpose, wasting no time on superfluous things. Every footstep is deliberate and calculated. Jesus is going to get where He's going and no one is going to stop Him.

The urgency continues right through to the end as Jesus prepares for His ascension. The closing verses of chapter 16 that are before us today had to take place at least one week after Easter, as all eleven disciples were present, including Thomas. And where the other evangelists share Jesus' gentleness with the frightened disciples, Mark continues to paint Jesus as just getting on with things, first rebuking the disciples' unbelief and unwillingness to believe the testimony of the women and the disciples who had returned from Emmaus who all bore witness that they had seen Jesus with their own eyes. And then with a stroke of irony, Jesus appoints those who wouldn't listen to the proclamation to be proclaimers of the good news themselves.

"Go," Jesus said. "Preach the Gospel everywhere. Anywhere there is a voice who will listen, preach. Proclaim to every sinner of every generation to come that I have taken away their sins from them. I have swallowed up the death that threatened to swallow up creation from man, to beast, to plant. Go and with this Gospel drive out demons and heal diseases and overthrow death. These are the fruits of my death and my resurrection. Whatever harm sin and Satan may seek to cause is undone because I am

no longer in the tomb. I am alive. Salvation is entirely accomplished and whoever believes this and receives the Baptism I give will be saved from sin and death. But anyone who does not believe, anyone who (like you guys just did) refuses the gifts which are offered will be condemned, will remain in their condemnation because they rejected the free promise. Whoever does not believe calls God a liar. Whoever does not believe will suffer eternity apart from God - not because He didn't desire them, but because they wouldn't believe those who have seen me since I have risen."

This is where St. Mark's simplicity is at it's most wonderful. Salvation is that simple. Believe and be baptized. Believe that Christ has saved you. Believe that He shed His precious Blood for you. These things are true. They have happened. And whoever, whoever, believes these simple and yet glorious words, spoken by the Lord and His apostles and prophets and evangelists and pastors and people has exactly what they say - the forgiveness of all their sins, life, and eternal salvation. Whoever believes these words will not taste death. Whoever believes these words knows that their little while of sorrow will one day be turned into an eternity of inexpressible joy. Whoever believes and thus is baptized into Christ will have nothing to fear in this life or the life to come. Neither poison, nor serpents, nor death itself will be able to harm them or take them away from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. This is not an exclusive Gospel. Any sinner who mourns his sins and longs for God to forgive him and rescue him from his sin, no matter how dark or vile the sin may be, may receive the salvation he desires by believing what Christ has already accomplished and promised to him.

And preach the apostles did. The apostles, who received the Lord's rebuke and repented of their unbelief, believed and "went out and preached everywhere." And they continue to preach the same gospel today, the same good news. We have the witness of those who have seen Jesus with their own eyes. Even more, we have the witness of those who were filled with doubt and who then saw the Lord Jesus, in the flesh, for themselves. Through St. Mark we have the apostolic witness of St. Peter. Their feet and their voices have carried them to the ends of the earth, even to Wylie, Texas with the Good News for you that God's beloved Son has won the victory over sin, death, and the devil.

Let your wearied hearts be comforted. Christ has died for you. Christ is risen indeed! Your sins are forgiven. Believe this in all its beautiful

simplicity. Hurry with St. Mark to your salvation - to the waters of the font and feast of Christ's victory. The apostles and the evangelists all bear witness to these facts so that you might believe and by believing be saved.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

In the Name of +Jesus.