

The Festival of St. Mark w/ the Rite of Confirmation for Rebecca Schwiesow and Winston Tiro
24 & 25 April, Anno Domini 2021
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 an ear that 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. I want all to have them and benefit from them. 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 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 God 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. Believe that you have been set free from the prison of sin and judgment. Believe that the death and chaos that fills the world has been overcome. 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 viruses, nor governments, nor bad parents, nor faithless spouses, nor a wicked culture, 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 on his behalf.

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 who hated Christ and sought to destroy Christ's Church. 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.

And in our own midst stand two this very day who have heard this preaching, who have received the apostolic witness and believed, who have been washed in Holy Baptism, and who would make their confession known to you this day that they

may join with us in feasting on our Savior's Body and Blood at our Father's table. Not that their confession is new to them. They have believed these things from the day of their Baptism. Rebecca and Winston are not new Christians. They have been hearing and learning the Word of God all the days of their lives - from parents, grandparents, pastors, and teachers. Nothing has been added to them that they didn't already have. They have only, by God's grace, been strengthened by the Word of God as they have continued to hear, study, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest it. Lord willing, they will continue to do these very things with an every growing earnestness and zeal as the day of the Lord draws near. God has continued to nourish and nurture and strengthen them as He promises all His children who remain seated at His feet, drinking deeply of the appointed means of our Lord's grace - the preaching of the Gospel and the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion.

Winston and Rebecca, your brothers and sisters here at Faith and the whole Church in heaven and on earth rejoice this day at the confession you are about to publicly make. But we are not rejoicing in you. We are rejoicing with and for you because of what God our Savior has done for you - that He has granted you the Holy Spirit in Baptism, that there He joined you to the death and resurrection of Jesus, and that He has brought forth faith in you - something neither you nor we could ever do. Today we praise the Name of the Most Blessed Trinity for including your names in the Book of Life. Today, the devil and his legions tremble because out of your lips will come those words that overthrow their entire kingdom - "I believe in Jesus Christ" and into your lips will pass the very object of your hope and faith - the same Lord Jesus Christ, His Body and His Blood, bringing with Him every blessing of His cross and empty tomb.

But do not be deceived - any of you. The precious gifts that have been bestowed upon you by Christ can be taken away. You can cast aside the free gift of salvation and eternal life by despising it and by failing to continually, all the days of your life, feed and nourish it by the Word of God and the sacraments - gifts which are only available to you because the Son of God offered Himself as a sacrifice upon the cross. As our Lord warned us, the days are growing darker. The enemies of God's Word are growing more and more bold. They hate Christ and anyone who dares to believe in Him. You will be tempted, as all God's children are. You will be mocked for your faith and many will exclude you. The world will lay traps for you, temptations to lure you away from Christ. They will offer you fun and pleasure. They will be sure to schedule things on the Lord's Day to make you choose between them and Christ. They will seek to fill your eyes and ears with

sweet tasting poison that will harm and destroy your faith. They will repeat the devil's age-old deceitful question - Did God really say?

And to make it even worse, your flesh will yearn after all of it and seek to betray you. The life of unbelief is easier. In unbelief, there is no need to restrain your flesh and its desires, desires which you have learned from God's Word are evil. It is easier to dishonor your parents and other authorities. It is easier to despise the preaching of God's Word, to not gather with the body of Christ, to go play, make money, or just sleep in. It is easier to lead an immodest and unchaste life in thought, word, and deed. It is easier to covet, to be angry, to lie, to not confess. But such things, our heavenly Father clearly warns us, harm and eventually destroy our souls. The way of faith is hard. It is hard to stop and pray, to say no to the desires of our flesh, to set aside all other things to receive the things of Christ, day in and day out, week after week, to not bow to the pressures of the world, to love those who hate you and bless those who persecute you and forgive those who sin against you. But you have been set free from selfishness and idolatry. You have been redeemed from slavery to your flesh. You have been given a new heart and the Holy Spirit to walk the way of repentant humility and faith that leads to everlasting life. Dear saints, do not let yourself be numbered among those who have once tasted the goodness and salvation of God but who grow disinterested or cold to your need and the gift so freely given. Do not let the world rob you of the comfort and peace of your Savior with its lies and delicacies. Let the Gospel of Jesus Christ dwell in you richly and abundantly, hearing it each and every day in your homes and in your Father's house.

This is the beating heart of our confession, the Gospel that St. Mark was not only eager to proclaim but was will to be martyred for. That Gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary is your Lord - our Lord. He saw our wretched and hopeless condition and did what none of us are capable of doing. Bearing our flesh, Jesus lived the life of perfect obedience to God and then died willingly under the Father's wrath against your disobedience. And upon you Rebecca, upon you Winston, upon all who believe are and baptized, Jesus freely bestows His perfect obedience and His perfect righteousness. No longer do sin and death have any power over you. You are children of the most High God and He will bring to completion the glorious work which He began at your Baptism. Through His Word, Christ will shelter and keep you on your pilgrimage through this world. He will strengthen you to resist temptation. He will forgive you when you falter on the way. He doesn't do this in a mysterious way. He does all this through the Means of Grace. His grace, poured out in the preaching and hearing and reading of His Word, given through the

visible means of the sacraments are the way Christ promises to be with you and keep you. Outside of these, there is no such promise. Outside of these there is no salvation, no help. But in them are all the blessings and promises of God.

Only cling to Him. Believe the testimony which St. Mark, the prophets, apostles, evangelists, your faithful parents, grandparents, pastors, and teachers have proclaimed to you. By daily contrition and repentance return to the promises of your Baptism and put to death the flesh with its evil, selfish desires. Lift up your voice in prayer to your heavenly Father in every need. He is eager to hear and ready to help. Fill your ears and hearts with the Word of God every day. Gather with the rest of God's children to receive Christ's gifts together and so that we might help one another to remain faithful during the very difficult days that lay ahead. Take up every weapon that the Lord provides. You need them - all of them. Regularly receive the absolution from your pastor that Satan may have no access to your conscience. As often as it is made available to you, receive Christ's Body and Blood and sacrifice everything to get it. Your salvation has been accomplished in full by the Lord Jesus Christ. He is so determined that you be certain of it that He has provided multiple ways of bestowing it on us.

Dear saints of God, the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand, in your very midst. Repent and believe the Gospel while it is yet called today. Lay aside every sin, every pleasure, every idol that so easily entangles and strive to enter the narrow gate. Let us encourage one another in the truth and in godly living. Let us not grow weary of doing good, of gathering with the saints, of teaching one another the Word of God. Rejoice in the works of the Lord, works that are despised by the world, and give thanks to the Lord who has proclaimed to you this day the glorious news of your salvation. 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.