

The Festival of the Resurrection of Our Lord
4 April, Anno Domini 2021
St. Mark 16:1-8
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

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

Alleluia! Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

The work is complete. The time of Sabbath, the time of rest is over. All things have been made new. The eternal day of life and truth has begun. The empty tomb can mean only one thing - all the sins that stood against you to terrify your conscience, the judgment of eternal death that threatened to consume all of fallen humanity, your pain, your sorrow, your enemies, your fear, your anxiousness - these all met their demise on Good Friday, when God's Son offered His own Blood as payment and yielded up His Spirit into the hands of the Father to satisfy the demands of God's wrath against your sin. There is now no sin to condemn you in Christ Jesus. You are forgiven.

And today, exactly what that forgiveness means, the result and ultimate promise of your salvation is made as certain and as clear as possible - having died with Christ in Baptism, we will rise from the dead just as our Lord did - body and soul. We will look upon the glorious face of our Savior with the very same eyes that today behold the trumpeting lilies and joyous banners that adorn this holy house. The tears that so often fill your eyes because of the confusion and harshness of this life lived under the shadow of death will be wiped away for all eternity. This is the glorious light which lightens every day. This is the joy that our Lord grants us not just this one day of the year, not just on Sundays - but every single day, even when those days are filled with pain and confusion and bitterness. Even in your darkest hour, even when all hope seems lost, even when it seems that everyone has abandoned you, even when it seems that you will have nothing good and your life is one tragedy after another - this truth, this unchangeable fact remains - Jesus Christ, who once hung lifeless on the cross, is alive! That's not just a neat historical fact. That changes everything forever for each and every man, woman, and child. The fact that Jesus is alive this day, seated on the throne of God, is the reality through which all of life is to be seen.

All the enemies of God who daily seek to overwhelm and destroy you have been crushed to the ground. Death itself is nothing. Your scarlet sins have been out scarleted by the Blood of Jesus. Your trials are empty threats. Your temptations

are empty lies. Your heartaches will not last forever. The devil who daily harasses and torments you has been robbed of his power. Wicked and evil men and their plans to overthrow the Lord's Christ and His Church will all come to nothing. Graves will be torn open and those who have died in Christ will rise in triumph first followed by Christ's Church who remain alive. We will be caught up in the air with our victorious King and never again will we know the sting and terror of sin and death.

What's more, the merciful Jesus who proclaimed the forgiveness and loving-kindness of God the Father, has been vindicated. All that He said was true. Jesus' resurrection definitively demonstrates that the compassionate and life-giving Divine Father, the God who desires that sinners live, who takes pleasure in saving us, who hears our prayers, who promises deliverance and help in every time of need, is the true God who has fully accomplished your salvation. And, even more astounding and comforting, Almighty God, who would have every right to demand a high price from us to enjoy this salvation, actually wants to give this salvation away for free. No works, no love, no improved life - just open your mouth wide and receive the gift. You don't need to wonder who is going to roll away the heavy stone and save you from death. Jesus did.

How utterly contrary to wisdom that death should be but a peaceful slumber and every day that you rise from your bed is just practice for the day when you will rise, like Jesus, from the grave to a new and eternal morning of life and joy. Even when we are sitting in the ashes with Job, lamenting our sorrow and the bitter pains of our life lived in this sin-consumed world, this truth remains - our Redeemer lives! Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified, has risen. He is not in the tomb. He is alive. And He hasn't simply gone before us to Galilee. He has gone before us into the heavenly places. He has taken His seat at the right hand of God the Father, to exercise His authority as the conqueror of death, to rule over all things in mercy for the blessing, preservation, and growth of His Church. He has gone to prepare a place for you that you may join Him there for eternity. And we will follow. We, like Jesus, will take up the very flesh that was laid in the grave and ascend to our heavenly home where sin and death and pain and tears will never be known again. There, Satan will never be able to harass our touch us ever again. All we will ever know there is joy and peace.

This is what you were created for. You were created to enjoy eternal life with God. He didn't make you for death. Death is not the natural order of things. If it were, there would be no need for Good Friday or Easter. If death is fine and normal and good, then Christ Jesus died in vain. But God is the giver of life.

Truly, God IS life. Thus when we were cast into death, we were cast away from God. Your Savior Jesus Christ has changed that. Where once you were doomed to far worse than a moment when you no longer walked on this earth but rather an eternity suffering the just death and punishment for your sins, now in Christ there is the promise of life for all who believe and receive this gift in faith. Now death is but an empty shadow, a powerless specter that cannot harm you. It doesn't even need to frighten you because you know that the moment right after your last breath, is the moment you will be with Christ in paradise and that will never end just as surely as Jesus will never return to the tomb. When the unbelieving world is running around in a panic at the possibility of death and wants you to be terrified right along with it, don't fall for it. Don't let them convince you that suddenly death has regained its power over you. You confidently say "No. I have already died. Death is nothing. Death is but a sweet passing out of the reach of sin forever. I long to be with Christ. Death is no longer a terror to me because my Lord Jesus Christ has died my death for me and He lives. And because He lives, I live. I have died to sin and I no longer live but Christ lives in me and the life I live I live to God. Satan, I defy thee! Death, I now decry thee. Fear, I bid thee cease." And perhaps, in hearing this good news and seeing your lack of fear, another poor sinner who is still trapped in the death of sin, will come to know the peace and joy of the risen Christ.

The resurrection of Jesus is the truth that pours forth light and peace and joy into all the dark corners of our life. There is nothing in our existence that remains unaffected by this Easter reality. Is your conscience still trapped in the dark tomb, convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that death is your only lot? Take heart. Jesus is alive! Your sins have no power over you. Does your life seem to be spinning hopelessly out of control, defined by nothing more than meaningless chaos, anxiety, and despair? Does it seem as though you are nothing more than a hopeless mess, a pointless existence, a waste? Take heart. Jesus is alive! Are you struggling at work? Take heart. Jesus is alive! Is your body filled with pain? Take heart. Jesus is alive? Is your marriage hurting? Take heart. Jesus is alive! As the Baptized, your life isn't yours. It is Christ's. God didn't create you to be great nor does His pleasure with you depend upon how productive, how organized, how put-together, how successful, or how happy you are. God created you to simply be His, to be clay in His hand for His purposes. He created you that He might love you and bless you. And even when you wandered away, when you rejected His love by selling yourself to the sinful desires of your flesh, He sought you out. He spared nothing to redeem you and have back as His dear child.

Your reality, your truth, isn't your emotions or your experiences or your struggles. Your truth isn't the number in your bank account, the label on your clothes, the grade on your report card, the number of people who follow you on Facebook or Instagram, or how good a person you think you've been. Your truth isn't even YOUR truth. That's an arrogant and a lonely way to live and it's a lie. Your truth is so much greater than that. Your truth is your Baptism. Your truth is the truth of Jesus whose death has destroyed the death of all people and whose life is the life of all who believe in Him. Your truth is the common truth of all the Baptized - that you have died with Him and you have also risen with Him. That alone is the truth. All that the flesh wants and thinks it needs are pure lie. It is all nothing, a chasing after the wind, a life lived in the tomb chasing after a righteousness that never existed.

The life you live is no longer about you, it doesn't need to be. Your life is safely hidden with God in Christ Jesus. You are His. You are alive even as He is alive. His resurrection is the promise of your own resurrection. You are dead to sin and alive to God now by faith and one blessed day by sight. You are dead to the world and its selfish, self-serving destructive ways. You are dead to the pleasures which the world tirelessly tries to sell you in an effort to lead you away from Christ. Those things are not life or happiness or peace. How can they be when they were precisely the things that crucified Jesus? The righteousness which men seek through the Law, exemplified by the Jewish Council, the righteousness of self-preservation and peace with the world, exemplified by Pilate and the Romans - these were antithetically opposed to Jesus and the righteousness He brought. Thus they killed Him, trying to destroy the righteousness of God, the righteousness which is a free gift. But Jesus is alive! Self-righteousness, the wisdom and works of the world - these have actually been judged and condemned. God the Father has vindicated the gracious words and works of Jesus as the only truth. He is life. He alone gives life and He has given it to you. The only righteousness is that which Jesus gives. The only peace is that which Jesus gives. The only good is the good that God gives. You are of Christ. You are not of the world. You cannot be of both. Cast out the world with its foolishness, its selfishness, and its emptiness. As St. Paul says in Romans 6 "So you also (as Christ) must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."

The tomb is empty! Jesus is alive! Beloved, this and this alone is truth. Your life, baptized into Christ, is a resurrection life. It is a life lived in the freedom and the peace of Christ Jesus. It is a life lived not trying to be saved but a life that has been saved. Every day you wake up baptized, already dead to sin and alive to God because He has declared it to be so. This day and every day is a festival of the

Lord's resurrection because the forgiving and life-giving word of the Lord endures forever. Just as surely as Jesus sacrificed His Body and Blood on the cross 2000 years ago, so He gives them to you today in the Communion feast of victory, promising to you that it is still true - your sins were finally and completely paid for, your death of judgment died, and your grave will not hold you. That is why He insists that the Christian receive it. The Lord Jesus Christ died in order to give you this food and commands that we take, eat, and drink. And unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood, unless you receive that which He died to give, you have no life in you. For this is the true and only food that leads to eternal life. Jesus is true Bread that has come down from heaven and the bread that He gives is His own holy Flesh. And as often as we eat this bread and drink this cup we remember and proclaim the death of our Lord, Jesus Christ, to the whole world. No better or clearer sermon could be preached than when the words instituting the Holy Sacrament fill your ears. May God grant that they would fill the whole earth and that all people would be saved and come to knowledge of the truth and sit at the table of our God!

So let us rejoice with the angels and the archangels and the whole company of heaven because Jesus lives! The tomb is empty! Your Lord and Savior, your brother, has gone before you to your heavenly Father's home and one day He will bring you and all the redeemed safely there.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**