

The Festival of the Resurrection of Our Lord
9 April, Anno Domini 2023

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

What the three faithful women were seeking to do for Jesus was truly very pious. They loved their Lord and wanted to afford Him the greatest respect for all He had done. They wanted to care for the precious body that had brought such hope and peace to them. They wasted no time after the Sabbath in heading to Jesus' tomb, undeterred by any thought of how silly they may have looked or perhaps even what danger they may face from those who hated Jesus. And for that let us praise and commend and emulate them. May we be filled with such unwavering devotion and eagerness to attend to the things of Jesus. But...they were wrong, at least insofar as they were going there to anoint a dead body. They should have known better. Jesus put it as bluntly as possible when He told the disciples "It is necessary that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise." Through the prophet David Christ had spoken "For you will not abandon my should to Sheol or let your holy one see corruption." (Pslm 16:10) The resurrection was always part of our redemption. If our Savior doesn't rise from the dead, then neither do we. The women should not have been going to visit the dead body of Jesus. They should have been going to the tomb to anxiously wait for His resurrection. But, to their credit, they at least were headed to the tomb. Where were the disciples? Were they encouraging the women by proclaiming to them the prophecies of Holy Scripture concerning the Christ and reminding them of Jesus' word? No. They weren't headed to Jesus tomb for either right or wrong reasons. Just as in the garden, they were completely abandoning Jesus...again. They were huddled in the Upper Room like cowards, worried about saving their own skins, living in fear of the same men who had put their Teacher to death. They were living in complete denial about Jesus words concerning His resurrection.

And while we can understand the various reactions of those who believed in Jesus, because we see the same weakness in our own flesh, the same slowness of heart to believe what God says, we shouldn't dare excuse it in either them or us. It was unbelief. It was ears that had failed to listen to Jesus and believe all that He had spoken. The cross, just as Jesus had warned, had so scandalized all who beheld it that they had lost all hope. They forgot the word Jesus had spoken, promising that when He rose He would see them again in Galilee. Jesus drew His last breath. He was dead. The Blood and water that poured out of His side when they withdrew the spear made that abundantly clear. Whatever hope they had was lost. It was over. The chief priests

and scribes and elders had finally won. Maybe, just maybe, Jesus wasn't who He made Himself out to be. Maybe they had been duped and thrown their lot in with just another false Messiah who promised a lot but couldn't deliver, couldn't overcome the might of the Romans who did not take kindly to rival rulers in their midst.

If the apostles and the women had believed Jesus, they would have rejoiced when Jesus cried out "It is finished" because they knew that marked the moment when atonement was made for the sins of the whole world, the moment when death and hell were conquered, when God's promises of old were brought to total fulfillment. They would have been counting down the hours until the third day giddy with anticipation because, of course, Jesus was going to rise from the dead. That's what He promised. And how could it not be so since death had been swallowed up in victory? All that our sin had merited was paid in full. The apostles shouldn't have had an ounce of fear and should have set a watch party at the tomb. The women should have been bringing Jesus a fresh set of clothes and a bite to eat.

Instead, all of them were filled with sorrow because they were living by sight and not by faith. They were slow to believe all that the prophets and Jesus Himself had spoken. But are we really so different? They at least have the excuse of having to witness the humiliation and crucifixion of Jesus. What is our excuse? Why are we so slow to believe and live in the joy of the resurrection? Why are we not always found where Jesus is? Why do we live in terror of the grave? Why do we fear the murderous machinations of wicked men? Why do we still open our arms wide to try to grasp as much of the things of this world as we can? We have the faithful testimony of those who saw Jesus after His resurrection. We have the Scriptures, the testimony of God Himself. Yet we so often, like the women, still walk around in sorrow and dismay, still wondering what will be done about all the things that are wrong and broken and evil in the world. Like the apostles, we flee and huddle in fear as though Jesus was lying dead in the tomb, overcome by death. We don't gather around the cross to meditate on His Passion perhaps because it is too scandalous, perhaps because we don't want to, perhaps because we don't want to confront the terrible reality of our own sin. We don't gather around His Word in our homes to feed and comfort one another with the victory of His death and the joy of His resurrection perhaps because we don't think it is of any benefit, perhaps because we think we're just too busy. We don't joyfully gather around Christ Himself as He bids us do when He comes to us week after week to absolve us and feed us with the very Body and Blood of our redemption perhaps because we have something that is more important to us or more beneficial, perhaps because we don't really think we need Christ's salvation.

Why do we walk in sorrow? Why do we huddle in fear? Why do we stay away? Why do we nurse our anger and our grudges? Why do we not call upon our Father in every

trouble? Why do we covet and lust and gossip and hate? Repent. We do these things because we, like the apostles and the women, struggle to believe that Jesus, who IS crucified, has been raised from the dead and now sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. We struggle to believe that because of our Baptism into Christ we are no longer in slavery to sin nor will we be condemned because of our sin. We still falsely imagine that there is anything greater or more life-changing than the Gospel. If these things weren't true of us there would be no need for exhortation. We wouldn't need to be urged to receive the Sacrament frequently, to go to confession, to feed the poor, to visit the sick, to pray with our families, to turn off our phones and TVs and read the Bible, to set aside the Lord's Day for gathering with God's people to sit at Jesus' feet and receive life and salvation from His hand.

Know this today with all certainty - Jesus Christ, the crucified, is not in the tomb no matter what the Jews and Pilate and the foolish world try to tell you. Jesus is risen. Your sins have been forgiven. Your death has been robbed of all its power and terror. Let no one deprive you of this glorious news. There is no need for fear or sorrow. Are you sick? Your sickness is but for a moment. Christ's death and resurrection have not only promised that your eternity will be spent entirely free of all sickness but that you will also be loved and cared for by your heavenly Father in the midst of your sickness. Are you overwhelmed with the endless demands of life? You do not live by bread alone. You live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. You need only to sit at Jesus' feet and be fed with the very bread of heaven. All that you need to support this body and life have already been prepared for you by your Father. Are you afraid of suffering? God your Father has promised you that whatever suffering He allows to befall you is only the gentle disciplining rod of a Father who loves you and who is protecting you from sin. It is not His anger. Indeed, He promises to work great blessing and good for you in your suffering.

Have you ever considered why, after rising from the dead, Jesus didn't just ascend into heaven and say "I already told them I was going to rise from the dead. If they don't believe that, too bad. That is their own problem. Let them figure it out." It is precisely because faith is so hampered in us. It is because we are so often driven to sorrow and fear by the terrors that surround us on every side. We are scandalized and confused by sickness, poverty, persecution, wicked rulers, the perversity of the world around us, abuse, adultery, children who leave the faith because they are seduced by the evil around them. Let this give you peace. Jesus doesn't chastise our dull hearts nor does He excuse them. He dies for them. He forgives them. He covers them and heals them with His Blood. He holds His resurrection before us constantly to strengthen and encourage us, to make our aching hearts glad again. He does not begrudge us our doubt and fear. Rather He provides for us that doubt and fear might be driven away.

As our hearts grow heavy at the thought and fear of death, Jesus sends messengers to us to proclaim again “Dear child, Jesus is risen. He is no longer here in the tomb. Death’s reign of terror truly is over. It has no power over you at all when you take refuge in Christ. What you fear is nothing more than an empty specter. Your Great High Priest has offered the eternal sacrifice for your sin. That sacrifice of His own life guarantees to all you who believe and are baptized that your grave will be nothing more than a resting place for your body until the resurrection on the Last Day. On that day your tomb shall be opened and your eternal Sabbath rest will have its beginning. There you will know neither doubt nor fear. There you will be gathered with the angels and the archangels and the whole company of heaven singing the great Te Deum of praise to the Lamb who was slain to whom alone belongs all glory, honor, power, and thanksgiving!” This is why Holy Communion is offered weekly in our midst - to strengthen our hurting and anxious hearts by placing Jesus’ victory and His promises into our ears and mouths. When faith receives Christ’s Body and Blood it is invigorated and strengthened against fear and doubt.

Dearly beloved of God, I have said it many times before, the consequences of Good Friday and Easter are eternal. Jesus’ death and resurrection are not just two events on a timeline. We aren’t gathered here today nor any other day that we gather in Jesus’ Name to mark events. The Lord has drawn all of us here because His Passion, His resurrection, and His ascension have changed all of reality. Every day is the day of resurrection. Every time we gather, we gather in the light and truth of the resurrection. We gather so that the forgiveness and life of Christ may be bestowed upon sinners who hunger and thirst for salvation. Consequently, to stay away from the precious Means of Grace is to stay away from Jesus for that is where Jesus has promised to be.

No longer must anyone walk around in fear and doubt. No longer must sin reign over either our consciences or our bodies. Atonement for the sins of the whole world has been made. One man, the Son of God, Jesus Christ has died for all and therefore all have died. There is no longer any condemnation for anyone found in Christ Jesus, baptized into His Name and clinging to Him by faith. The crucified Jesus has been raised from the dead and so He will remain forever. And because that is true His promises also remain forever. Resurrection is the beautiful flower that has sprung forth from the thorns of death. Only let us not return to the sorrow and fear of unbelief. Let us neither live in sorrow and hopelessness as though Jesus is still dead, nor stay away from Him by fearing the hatred of the world or remaining in our sin and so denying the work of the cross.

God grant that we may believe all that Christ has spoken and hasten with joy to where He promises to be for us, where He still speaks peace to wearied consciences, where

He conquers death, where He washes away sin, where He teaches us truth, where He feeds and strengthens us as we eagerly await that day when He stands in our midst once again and we behold Him face to face. This eternal day of resurrection and life is the day which the Lord has made for us, for you. Let us forever rejoice and be glad in it for it truly will never end.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God and of His Christ which passes all human understanding keeps your hearts and your minds through faith in Jesus Christ our Lord.