

**Christ has risen! "Christ has risen indeed!"**

Mark 16:1-8

Isn't it good to chant the angels' Christmas song again? Glory be to God on High and on earth, peace, good will toward men. Isn't it good to celebrate the success of the Son of God's mission to the world? That's the true meaning of Easter you know. The Father accepted all the work that the Son of God did for you and me - His coming into the flesh in the incarnation - His placing Himself under the law and keeping it perfectly - His profound obedience to the Father's will as He allowed mere mortal men to nail Him to a cross - His shameful death on accursed wood. The resurrection means that the Father accepted everything that Jesus did and has credited it to our account. Jesus has won the forgiveness of sins not just for a few people, but for all people - not just for a few sins, but for all sins.

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Easter means that when Jesus gave that last triumphant cry on the cross, "It is finished," that it really was finished and will always be finished. Easter means that Jesus really is the Son of God and that every word He says is the truth. Easter is God's promise to us that even though we die, the grave cannot hold us for we will live again at the throne of God.

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Of course that long ago day when Jesus rose from the dead did not begin in such a festive mood for those who loved Him. Jesus had risen, but no one knew it. Everyone who knew Jesus - friend and foe alike - thought Jesus was very dead- three days worth. Many witnesses had seen Jesus die. Many had seen the blood and water flow from the wound of the spear that pierced Jesus' side. The day of Christ's resurrection began in unimaginable sadness for many.

Jesus' friends had not even been able to give Jesus a proper burial and this intensified the grief. Jesus had died too close to the Sabbath. By the time Joseph of Arimathea could get permission to remove the body from the cross, they didn't have time to do much more than a rush job. They were fortunate that Joseph had a new grave near by and they were barely able to place Jesus in the grave and apply some linens before the Sabbath arrived. How that unfinished burial must have filled their thoughts while they waited a whole day for the end of the Sabbath.

As soon as the sun set on the Sabbath, they went shopping and got all the spices- Scripture notes a hundred pounds worth- and other supplies they needed to complete the burial. They had everything arranged so that they could get an early start the next morning. Every hour that they waited was another hour of decay for the body of their dear master. They wanted to do everything possible in the tomb before the heat of the day set in. Time was of the essence and so we find these grief-stricken women already en route to the tomb as the sun began to light up the eastern sky.

Sometime during their walk to the tomb, the women realized they had left something out of their plans, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" How would they get into the tomb to do this last work of love for their master?

As the women discussed the stone, they approached the tomb, and the stone was the first thing they saw. It was not where it was supposed to be. It looked as if it had been tossed aside. In fact, that is exactly what had happened. Matthew writes, (Matthew 28:2) "An angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it."

The stone was not the only unusual thing that the women saw. When they entered the tomb, a young man in a white robe waited with a message for them.

He said, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him." The first part of his message told the women that they could not find Jesus where they expected Him to be.

Secondly, he said to them, "Go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you."

Jesus was not where they expected Him to be. That is a lesson that is good for all time.

We all come into this world with a God-shaped space inside of us. We all have questions: Why are we here? What is the meaning to life? What is the real difference between good and evil? Does anything happen after death and, if something does happen after death, what is it? Is there hope for eternal life? These and many other questions reveal a great desire for something or someone who is bigger than we are - someone who is in control - someone who has all the answers. That is that God-shaped space making itself known.

An honest person quickly understands the inability to save oneself. We are weak and irresponsible. We are sinful. We fail. That is why we can never save ourselves. That is why our salvation must come from outside of us, in Christ alone!

The true religion is unexpected. Instead of making us fill our own emptiness, God fills it for us. Only those who trust in Jesus Christ no longer have that empty space. Through the person and work of Jesus Christ, God comes to us and takes His rightful place in our heart. The angel in the tomb tells who this Jesus really is. He is Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is

Jesus of Nazareth, who has risen. This is the Jesus who fills in the God-shaped emptiness we all have.

But, if God is so unexpected, how can we get together with Him so that He can fill our emptiness with His salvation? That is where the second half of the angel's message comes into play. He said to them, "Go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you." God uses other people to bring His Good News to us. The angel instructed the women to share the good news of the resurrection with the disciples. Jesus Himself told His church to make disciples by baptizing and teaching. The Holy Spirit comes to us as pastors, teachers, friends, relatives, and neighbors confess their faith to us. In turn, the Holy Spirit works through us as we confess that faith to others. In an unexpected way, the Holy Spirit uses the church to reach the church.

Jesus comes in another unexpected way. On the night He was betrayed, He gave an inheritance to His church. He bequeathed His body and Blood to His disciples. At His death, His last will and testament went into effect just like any other will. But then Jesus did something unexpected. He did not stay dead. With His resurrection, the body and blood that He bequeathed to His people lives once again. With His resurrection, Jesus gets to do something absolutely unique. He gets to celebrate with His heirs as they enjoy the riches of His estate! We receive the body Christ gave for us and the blood Christ shed for us, but they are no longer dead, for Christ has risen. The body we receive by mouth with the bread is a living body. The blood we receive by mouth with the wine is a living blood.

How unexpected the true faith is. Jesus comes to us by ear when we hear His word, He comes to us by water when God makes us His own through baptism, and He comes to us by mouth when we receive the sacrament of His body and blood. Who would have

believed such things if Jesus Christ did not give us the promise Himself?

That is where the resurrection comes in. Jesus kept His promise to rise from the dead. This shows us that He keeps all His promises. He keeps His promise to come to us and He will keep His promise to take us where He is, for He said, (John 14:3) "I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." That is a promise we can believe for Christ has risen!

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He has risen indeed, Alleluia! Amen & Amen!

Acknowledgements:  
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