

SERMON DRAFT
TEXT: MARK 16:1-8
SERMON: EASTER 2018

Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Hallelujah!

Sometimes we just have to see it to believe it. It is a reasonable approach to life. For example, in business dealings, it is always wise to read the contract before we sign it. Put it in writing. This is just common sense in the world we live.

Mark brings to us a puzzling picture. In chapter 16, today's Gospel, he offers to us his resurrection account. However, his account is different from the other Gospel writers. What is different? There is no Jesus. There is no sighting of him. Mark reports to us that people are talking about Jesus' resurrection, but there still is no Jesus. This is troubling. It sounds like a myth in its infant stages. Could it be? If we do not see Jesus with our own eyes, did he really rise from the dead?

This story is too good to be true. You know how we react to things that are too good to be true. We conclude that they are false. Where is the evidence that Jesus is alive? Where is he?” questions the skeptic and, by the way, the realistic person too.

When one questions Jesus’ resurrection, then the crucifixion must be questioned. If the crucifixion is questioned, then his birth and life must be questioned. If the birth and life of Jesus is questioned, then his conception by the Holy Spirit must be questioned. The whole life of Jesus, from conception to ascension, all fits together as one message. The bottom line is that when one doubts the resurrection, then one doubts God and his promises to us throughout history. It has a destructive effect on our salvation.

The promises of God in the Old and the New Testament bring to us a Savior, a Lamb, and a Redeemer. The message is that God himself will take our place, not just any lamb, any redeemer, or any human. Rather, the human must be God himself, who could be given in exchange for our sins.

The life of the God-man must be given in exchange for the life of all humanity. These are the promises the Church has heard ever since sin entered into the world. The Lamb of God was sacrificed once for all people, and in his resurrection, he proclaims his victory over death.

However, the resurrection is the victory proclamation of the power of Jesus to overcome death. Jesus was exalted into his heavenly power and might when he descended into hell, after he gave up his Spirit in death. Then he rose from the dead. But it is not the resurrection that saved us. Jesus did not earn the forgiveness of sins in his descent into hell or in his resurrection. The resurrection is the “I told you so!” of the Gospel message. It is a moment of glory for our Lord. Jesus earned salvation for us through the humility of the cross, not the glory of the resurrection. Still, everything hinges on this outcome of the life and death of Jesus.

Jesus saved us through the humility of his miraculous conception, life, suffering, and death. We need to remember that all people will rise from the dead, believers and unbelievers. The message of Easter is not about our resurrection, but the resurrection of Jesus.

Just as the crucifixion is not merely about the death of just anybody, so the resurrection is not just about any resurrection. After all, other people were crucified throughout history, and Lazarus and others rose from the dead. So, what makes Easter different? What makes Good Friday different? What makes Mark's report of the resurrection different?

Mark's Gospel provides us with the testimony of the angel and the fulfillment of the promises of God's Word. It shows the reality of our daily lives. We could easily be substituted for the women at the tomb.

In Mark's Gospel, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome went to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. Have you ever wished you were there that glorious Easter morning? It would be so exciting. As we look at our Gospel from Mark, is his recording of Easter really so different? Could it be a picture of unbelief?

Did these three women doubt the Word of God? Did they believe Jesus when he proclaimed his resurrection? Is this a foretaste or prophecy of Thomas, the one who doubted that Jesus was alive?

We love to pick on Thomas because he effectively said, “Prove it!” But we seem to leave out these three women, who were among the many doubters. Yes, even in the midst of Jesus’ closest circle of believers, there were doubters. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome went to the tomb to anoint the dead body of Jesus. They did not think he was going to rise from the dead.

Those of us who live two thousand years later can easily look down on Thomas, the three women, and others who did not live faithfully according to God’s Word. Yet it still bugs us, because they were there and saw Jesus. They watched him walk around, perform miracles, and preach in the temple. It seems that they should have had an advantage that we don’t have.

If we saw Jesus today, would we believe he is God? Would we believe he was—even before the world was created? Would we think this man, who is walking around performing miracles and claiming to raise people from the dead, is the same God who created the world?

Did Jesus look like God when he was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane and in turmoil over his proclaimed path to the Passion? Would we think for a moment that God would die? Did Jesus look like God when he was stripped, beaten, and mocked? Did Jesus appear to be God as he hung on the cross? Did he seem like God to us when he cried out, *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* (Matthew 27:46).

Maybe we would be more like Thomas and the three women were we alive then. It is very likely, at least for the sake of friendship, that we, too, would have taken spices with us to the tomb early on the first day of the week, because we believed that a lifeless body was to be found in the tomb.

To trust our Lord’s words when he spoke of a kingdom that would never end, or how he would go away and then return, or that he truly was the resurrection and the life is against all reason and common sense. What are the chances?

That is the point. It is not about chances. It is about God's promises throughout history. The resurrection becomes the proclamation of the fulfillment of God's promises. It is the very evidence we have that Christ has conquered death. Yet whether it is the young man in white robes of Easter morning speaking to the three women or you and I reading God's Word, our faith must grasp what we read and trust it.

The Gospel is the work of God. Our reason or common sense rebels against the Holy Spirit as he comes to us through the Word. He must even create the very faith that grasps the Word of the Gospel, for we cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ our Lord or come to him. Our sinful minds will try to reason things out and then see if we can conclude that this crucified man is God and that he really could have risen from the dead.

Just as Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome had only the word of God's messenger, so we, too, have God's messengers to provide us with the promises of the Gospel. It is only faith that believes God's Word.

Only faith is able to confess that Jesus is true God and true man. Only faith can confess that Jesus' conception was that of the Holy Spirit. Only faith can grasp that God made Mary's womb his throne for nine months. Faith alone can cause Elizabeth to confess that Mary is the mother of her Lord. Only through faith is one able to look at the body of Jesus on the cross and proclaim that the glory of God is in this death, for God is the one who died for our sins. These matters of faith are just that: God could only reveal to us these teachings, and faith can only accept them and then give thanks for them.

The resurrection is also a matter of trusting God's Word, whether it is the word of the young man in the tomb or Mark's recording of that incident. We must repent of our unbelief when we second-guess God and his Word. We are in the same circumstances as the three women and Thomas. Mark's account of the resurrection is no different from what we know in our lives.

Yet we might think back and cry out, “But they were there and eventually saw Jesus.” Yes, that is true. Our Lord knows we need his physical presence as well. His grace, mercy, and forgiveness come to us where he said he would be present, in his Word and Sacraments. The resurrected body and blood of Jesus is the very message of Easter.

What this really means is this: every time the Lord’s Supper is celebrated, it is Easter. In the Holy Supper, God himself is present, not because he is the Creator and all-powerful God, but rather because in the humility of bread and wine and the spoken Word he proclaims himself to have risen from the dead. The very work of the crucifixion, the payment for sins, comes to us through this Holy Meal. Here, he appears to us in this Easter celebration, in his Word, and in his very body and blood. Through faith, that is, trust in his Word, we receive him into our presence and enjoy the forgiveness of sins. As you approach the altar today, let the words of the young man in white robes ring in your ears, ***“There you will see him, just as he told you”*** (Mark 16:7).

Amen