

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: Revelation 1:4–18**

**Sermon: “He Died, He Lives”**

**He Is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!** Easter is more than one day in the life of the Church. We celebrate the resurrection of our Lord for a season, indeed, every Sunday is a “little Easter,” even in Lent. Without a bodily resurrection, we are left with nothing; with the resurrection of Jesus, we have it all.

Have you ever noticed though how nearly every year around Easter the news magazines and internet blogs will bring out alternative theories to explain—really, to explain away—the resurrection of Jesus from the dead? The disciples were fooled by their overactive imaginations. The apostles hatched a plot to pull a fast one to get some gullible people to believe Jesus rose. Or if you care for the Muslim version, Jesus is a prophet of Allah, but was not the Son of God, and did not die on the cross. Someone else was crucified in his place and Jesus was directly raised up to Allah without dying.

Yet what we heard in our First Reading this morning is the apostolic witness from the very beginning: even when faced with prison or death, they could not stop telling what God had done. Peter and the apostles answered the authorities, *“We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him”* (Acts 5:29–32).

Some sixty years later, John alone remained of the twelve apostles. Nearly one hundred years of age, he was exiled to the island of Patmos because of his testimony of Jesus. Here, God gave him the visions that begin in our second lesson today. Here is a portion of that text: *(Read Revelation 1:9–16.)*

Why is it that the world often cannot accept the testimony of the resurrection but has to put forward other alternatives?

The truth is, people instinctively know that the resurrection of Jesus calls for repentance. If God went to such lengths that God himself would come into our flesh, die in our place, and bodily rise again, we must have desperately needed him to do it. Though they may not want to admit it, most people when they hear it, recognize that, if Jesus actually did rise from the dead, then we somehow have to come to terms with that. *But* if a person doesn't want to repent, or if we don't think we really need to repent, that we're okay on our own, then we'll try to hold Jesus at arm's length.

Question, why do people become atheists? Many question why a good God would allow children to suffer. God doesn't behave according to their expectations. They have concluded, as a result, that there is no Savior, or if there is, they don't need or want one. So, they go on without God.

People generally do acknowledge that Jesus lived two thousand years ago, but they often want to find a way to set him aside, or to fit him into some kind of box, or to reduce him to a category we can understand and explain. But the Jesus of Scripture will not allow himself to be put into our boxes or to be limited by us. He is the Almighty, the first and the last, ruling over all things.

Just as Scripture tells of the real death of Jesus on our behalf, so the apostolic witness is clear: Jesus bodily rose from the dead. That fact supersedes everything. When John saw him, he said, ***“I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, ‘Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades’”*** (vs 17–18).

Then, in a series of seven visions of increasing intensity, each one covering the whole time between Pentecost and the end, Revelation overwhelms us with the assurance of Christ’s victory, that Jesus Is Alive Forevermore, So in Him We Will Live Also.

John is on Patmos, exiled for his testimony of Jesus, but in these visions, God allows him to peek behind the curtain, so to speak, to see and hear the Lord Jesus in all his glory, and to see that he has the keys of death and hell.

How many times have you been bothered by the devil's temptations? Jesus has the key to lock him up where he belongs. The key is his Word, the sharp, two-edged sword of Law and Gospel. He is alive to give us what we need more than anything, to cleanse us from our sins by the washing of water with his Word. He is alive now to make us a kingdom of priests to his God and Father so that, forgiven and restored, we serve him with our sacrifices of praise. Every day becomes an offering of service to him. Every time we tell someone of his love for them, we are serving him as his royal priests.

How many times have you watched a funeral director take out his removable crank to crank shut the lid of a casket? Jesus has the key that will *open* every casket.

It will be his voice; as with Lazarus, he will call you by name and say, “Come out of there!” And we shall rise, just as he said.

Yes, we die a real death. Jesus also truly died—no one took his place; he was there for us. And just as he rose from the dead and is truly alive forevermore, so he will raise us and give us the life that never ends.

One of the more potent demonstrations of the resurrection of Jesus is the continued existence for two thousand years of the Christian Church. From the very beginning, enemies tried putting the apostles in prison. They exiled John to Patmos. Eventually all the other apostles were martyred. All the way down to today, the enemies of Christ think they can silence the Church by killing believers. But the Word of God will not be silenced, for the one speaking the Word is the same living Jesus who appeared to John. He is the Almighty himself, with a long white robe and a golden sash signifying authority, with eyes of fire and feet like burnished bronze, with a face shining as the sun in full strength, and a voice like the roar of many waters.

When John saw him, he fell at his feet as though dead, but Jesus laid his hand on him and said, ***“Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore”*** (Rev 1:17–18). So also we, when faced with our own sin and death, must turn and repent of our sin, must own up to our need, and put away all our excuses. We must recognize we are dying, that we cannot stand in his presence.

So just as Jesus laid his hand on John to say, “Fear not!” so also Jesus lays his Word on us: “Fear not!” ***“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me”*** (John 10:14). ***“Fear not, your sins are forgiven you, go and sin no more.”*** ***“Fear not . . . I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day”*** (John 6:38–39). And even as he speaks his Word, so Jesus also cleanses us by his blood in the water of Baptism and touches our lips with his body and blood for forgiveness and life everlasting.

One more proof of the resurrection is found in what we're doing right now. We have gathered for worship on *Sunday*. Think of it. For centuries, Jewish believers gathered on the Sabbath, on Saturday. Suddenly, and without turning back, Jewish believers in Jesus began to worship on Sunday—the Lord's Day, John called it. What changed that deeply held practice? Only something as fundamental as a real Sunday-morning resurrection from the dead. So now think also of this: for two thousand years, somewhere, somehow, God's people have been acting on our Lord's command, "Do this, in remembrance of me." You and I today join in that long line of believers who receive the gifts, who trust that behind forms of bread and wine there will stand, by the power of his Word, the living Lord Jesus Christ, giving us his body and blood. He says, "I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and hell." In the name of this Jesus!

Amen!