

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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First Sunday after Easter, April 27, 2014

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 202, 204:1, 203, 190, 205.

Lessons: Jeremiah 3: 11-16, Acts 5:12-32, John20:19-29.

Sermon Text: Matthew 28:8-10.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The women who came to anoint Jesus' body were met by an angel at the empty tomb. The angel told the women *"Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."* (Matthew 28:5-7)

The women quickly obeyed the command of the angel. They had the privilege of telling Jesus' other disciples the good news. The disciples had to hear the joyful news, and that news was also to be spread abroad in other places. Fear as well as joy was in their hearts. Today let's look carefully at

THE WOMEN WHO CAME TO HONOR JESUS LEAVE THE EMPTY TOMB

- 1. As the women leave the empty tomb, afraid yet joyful, Jesus meets them.**
- 2. They want to hang on to him and worship him,**
- 3. But he gives them to work to do.**

These women were frightened. They had seen an angel, Matthew tells us. The other evangelists tell us more angels showed up at the resurrection of Jesus. The angel told them not to fear but to tell others.

They left the tomb to follow the instructions of the angel but after they told the disciples, we hear from the other evangelists that the overall attitude and feeling of Jesus' disciples, including these women, was doubt. They didn't believe what Jesus had told them previously and now they didn't believe what the angels had just told them. Later this day Jesus himself would make it clear to them again. They didn't understand what they had seen. And human reason has difficulty believing what we don't understand. They didn't know what to think.

They were to *"go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.'"* (Matthew 28:7) *"So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples."* As they hurried away, they experienced a still greater joy. Something happens which reinforces what the angel had said. They meet Jesus himself, and he tells them the same thing. *"Suddenly Jesus met them. 'Greetings,' he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.'"*

So as they ran off to find the disciples, they had more than the word of an angel. They could say that they had seen Jesus! His invitation to meet in Galilee was a repetition of what he had said before his death, to the disciples on Maundy Thursday. *"Jesus told them, 'This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.'"* (Matthew 26:31-32)

Today they immediately recognized him and fell down and worshiped him. Jesus repeated the message they had just heard from the angel.

Now the women's Easter joy was complete – or should have been complete. They saw Jesus himself. They were so happy that they fell down and worshiped him, embracing their risen Lord.

But right here we need to emphasize an important idea. ***“They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him.”*** They obviously knew it was Jesus, the glorified Jesus, with ***“his glorious body.”*** (Philippians 3:21) There's no mention of his terribly beaten, bloody, battered body after the resurrection. The only such mention of his appearance in Scripture is the nail holes in his hands and feet and the spear wound in his side that he stressed when talking to Thomas in John chapter 20. The women, recognizing him, fell down at his feet in their joy and adoration. But they were clinging to him as though in fear of losing him once more.

In John 20:17, when Mary Magdalene met him, ***“Jesus said, ‘Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”***

Jesus was warning Mary there and, in essence, all his followers that they should not try to hang on to him as they had known him on earth. He was no longer to be physically with them as he had been for about three years. They were to let go of his physical body and presence, for in 40 days he would ascend bodily into heaven. He would be with them with his spiritual presence, for God is omnipresent, present everywhere. Jeremiah tells us ***“‘Do not I fill heaven and earth?’ declares the LORD.”*** (Jeremiah 23:24) Even today many people have a desire to have “holy” things present with them. After all, don't we all have keepsakes from special events in our lives? Think of the thousands and thousands of religious “relics” humans have accumulated: bones and clothing of people designated “saints” by the Catholic Church, and pieces of the ark or cross of Jesus and other things. Even today such relics are honored by Catholics. People even think of water from the Holy Land, such as from the Jordan River water as being special, or even “holy”. And to have Jesus stay with them on earth! What a grand thing that would be!

But that is not to be. In addition to God's omnipresence, God and his son Jesus and the Holy Spirit are also present with us in his inspired Word, the Bible. In fact, Jesus is The Word of God, and as such was present at creation.

“Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.’” Jesus again reassures them. There should be no fear in their hearts. They should now be concerned about bringing the joyful news to the apostles, whom he here lovingly calls his brothers.

Jesus calls them ***“my brothers”***. He knew they were going to feel guilty about the way they had all forsaken him and fled in Gethsemane when he was betrayed and taken prisoner. But he wanted them to know that he had forgiven them. He was anxious to see them. They did not have to be afraid of what he would think of them when they saw each other again. This is the first time in the gospels where he calls his followers “brothers”. He had previously called them “friends”. When he speaks of judgment day, he speaks of believers as his brothers, as in Matthew 25. ***“The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’”*** (Matthew 25:40)

The fact that he called them brothers was intended to cheer and comfort them, and to renew faith, hope and trust in their hearts. We learn from Galatians 3:26 that all believers ***“are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus,”*** and if we are sons of God, we are also then adopted brothers and sisters of God's only-begotten Son Jesus Christ. Through their faith they have become partakers of all the glorious fruits of Christ's resurrection. And thus they have been placed by God the Father on the same level with his own Son Jesus Christ, being coheirs of eternal joy and blessedness with him.

Notice that Jesus talked to them. Again we must realize that it is the Word of God that teaches us, that comforts us, that encourages us and gives us hope. We don't have to feel that we are missing out on something because we have not seen Jesus face to face. We have everything God wants us to know all laid out in the Bible.

One writer said that Jesus seems to be inviting them to think of themselves as his colleagues. The “seminary training” of his disciples was just about over. Soon they would be preaching the same gospel Jesus had been preaching for the last three years or so while they watched and learned. And aren't all believers colleagues of Jesus? He has given all of us work to do.

“Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.’” Jesus told them again what the angel had told them about what they were now to do. They wanted to worship him here and now. But they needed to be reminded of their task. Don’t we all need reminders?

For example, when is the last time you heard that your sins are forgiven? Wasn’t it done publicly last Sunday, yet you heard the same thing again this morning when it was announced that “almighty God, our heavenly Father, has had mercy upon us and has given his only Son to die for us and for his sake forgives us all our sins. To them that believe on his name, he gives power to become the sons of God and has promised them his Holy Spirit. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.”

Jesus gave them the same instructions as the angel had just given them: ***“Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”*** Yet they grabbed on to Jesus and worshipped him. They wanted him as he was before, physically leading and teaching them first hand but it wasn’t going to work out that way. They were supposed to go forward, and begin doing what Jesus tells all his followers at the end of Matthew’s gospel: ***“go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*** (Matthew 28:19-20 New International Version)

Even the secular world is filled with proverbs and aphorisms that tell us that if you’re not moving forward, you are really going backward.

God tells his disciples, and that includes us, again and again about our mission on earth. We, too, as Jesus disciples, are to go forward and tell about Jesus, and his resurrection, and the forgiveness of sins he offers to all men.

The command to go and tell given by the angel and repeated by Jesus himself is also important for us. We too should realize that we have something wonderful to tell other people. Many things that are trivial, worthless, and even harmful are being told, preached and broadcast throughout the world in every possible way. We think we live in an enlightened age, but the news we hear in radio and television newscasts is mostly bad and makes us sad. We as believers in Christ have news that is life-giving for human souls. It is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the glorious good news of Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection. There is nothing the people of the world need more than to hear this good news. The world without Jesus Christ is lost in sin and bound for everlasting damnation in hell. People are helpless to save themselves. They may even have the false idea that if they try their best to live a good life, they can earn eternal happiness in heaven.

But the truth is this: ***“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”*** (Acts 4:12) That is the blessed name of Jesus our risen Savior.

When we hear this Word of God we should think about personal mission work. The women went personally to the disciples to spread the good news. They did not push this work on someone else. They did it joyfully, not as though they were doing a trivial and unimportant task. So we also should consider personal mission work as our obligation. A great sin and danger is Christians remaining silent when they should be proclaiming the truth in Christ at every opportunity. We must confess Christ before others. Jesus has commanded his followers, ***“Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”*** (Mark 16:15) How can we stand back and show a lack of interest in doing mission work when our risen Lord says, ***“Go and tell!”***

Now that we have again been assured of Jesus’ resurrection and the precious blessings that we have because of it, should we not consider it a precious privilege to tell others the good news? Other people, whoever they are, are just like us in that they are troubled by their sins and have many problems that may seem insurmountable to them. If we don’t share the good news of the Gospel with them, they may never hear it, never rejoice in Christ, and die in their unbelief. Nothing could be sadder than that. So, let us not be hesitant in speaking to others about our risen Savior and the joy we have in believing in him. Let us also show others by our Christian life that we belong to Christ and want to give him glory and honor. Amen.