

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Easter Sunday, April 5, 2015

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Lessons: Isaiah 25:1-9, 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, Mark 16:1-8.
Sermon Text: Matthew 28:1-8.
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

This morning we see a group of women going to the cemetery. Perhaps you yourself have gone to the cemetery to visit the grave of a loved one. They, however, had a very special purpose. They wanted to honor the body of someone who had quickly been laid in the grave three days earlier. Now of course Jesus had not been buried in the sense that his body had been sealed into a casket and then covered by dirt. He had been laid in an above-ground sepulcher or mausoleum. This was the custom of many wealthy Jews at this time. Isaiah tells us ***"He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth."*** (Isaiah 53:9)

These women had the intention of cleaning his battered and beaten body and anointing his body with spices so that they might honor him in his death. He had been a good friend. He had done much for them in an earthly sense. They may not have fully understood that he was their Savior from all their sins, their Redeemer, the Messiah promised in the Old Testament scriptures. But their intention to honor his memory by treating his dead body with respect and great care was not to be. Because

JESUS' BODY IS NOT IN THE GRAVE

- 1. The women were afraid.**
- 2. An angel reminds them what the word of God had promised.**
- 3. This promise is intended for all men.**

Scripture makes it very clear that the women who went to anoint his body had seen where his body was placed three days earlier. He had been placed there hastily so that his dead body would not still be hanging on the cross over the Sabbath Day, which was a special Sabbath, the Passover Sabbath.

So they were greatly surprised by what they found. And they were sad that they didn't find the body of Jesus. John tells us that Mary Magdalene was weeping and told a man whom she thought was the gardener ***"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him."*** (John 20:13)

But there was more than just surprise and sadness. In their hearts there was fear. They were afraid. They were afraid because his body was not there, and they now saw an angel. They had an empty grave in front of them and the angel made them very much afraid and was telling them something that surprised them.

Matthew tells us that others were afraid too. The soldiers who had been placed there to guard the tomb had been scared by events that have happened. Earlier ***"There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men."***

Other of Jesus' disciples were afraid. John also tells us that later on the same day ***"On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!""*** (John 20:19)

And now the angel tells 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."

He's risen! Jesus told you this was going to happen. And now the angel tells the women again.

But what was their reaction? Matthew tells us **"So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples."**

What kinds of things make you afraid? Well we would probably say 'scary things', 'things that surprise you and startle you', 'sudden unexpected things', and 'things that are out of the ordinary'.

Well this event was certainly unexpected, it was certainly out of the ordinary. Everything they thought they knew about death had been turned upside down. Now you can be sure that at least some of these women were aware of the fact that Jesus had raised other people from the dead. But to raise himself from the dead? To come back to life himself? That was something they didn't expect. But he had told his followers that he **"must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again."** (Mark 8:31)

That was something they had probably forgotten that he told them.

In their fear God speaks to them through an angel. Now God doesn't speak to us through angels today. He speaks to us through his written Word, the Bible. The writer of the New Testament letter to the Hebrews tells us: **"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe."** (Hebrews 1:1-2)

And Jesus tells all mankind: **"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."** (John 5:24) He assures us: **"The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life."** (John 6:63) Peter expressed this bold confidence: **"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."** (John 6:68)

Yet even the angel frightened them. This was totally unexpected. Just about every time in the scriptures when an angel appears men are frightened, afraid.

First, the women don't find Jesus' body in the grave where they had seen him laid. Then an angel gives them a message. **"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."**

Then we read: **"So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples."**

They were filled with joy, because there was faith in their hearts. They did what the angel told them to do. But they were still afraid. This fear was not unique to the women. As you read the last chapters of all four Gospels you will see that all of the disciples were afraid on this first day of Jesus' resurrection. His disciples hid behind locked doors. Two disciples on the way to the village of Emmaus were trying to figure out what had been going on. Other followers of Jesus were afraid and didn't know what to make of all this.

But the fact remains that the grave is empty. Jesus is no longer dead. This is a miracle. This is a suspension of the normal laws of nature.

Jesus, who had lived a perfect life, had been executed in the most humiliating way. His body had been hurriedly placed in a tomb. And the tomb had been sealed and guarded at the direction of the enemies of Jesus who were afraid that his disciples would come and steal his body and then claim that he had risen from the dead.

But you know the rest of the story. Many do not believe Jesus rose from the dead and came back to life. Despite what many people claim, including some who claim to teach and preach the Bible, the Holy Ghost has worked faith in God's children. Because God has given you faith, you believe the rest of the story. Jesus has come back to life. He has risen from the dead.

What does this mean for you? You, too, will be raised from the dead. With Martin Luther's explanation to the Apostolic Creed, you confess that on the Last Day God will raise me and all the dead and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ.

Your sins will not bind you and burden you and drag you down to hell eternally. You aren't destined to go to the grave and stay there forever. God tells us plainly **"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."** (Mark 16:16) and **"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved."** (Acts 16:31)

Jesus really can forgive sins. What does that mean? First you must understand your sins. You've not kept God's law – not one little bit well enough to earn your own way out of the grave into eternal life. Maybe you obey God's laws and man's laws well enough to impress other people. But not well enough to earn heaven. Only Jesus did that when he kept all God's laws perfectly.

Unfortunately many don't recognize sin as an important enough factor in their own lives to want to do anything about it. But God's law says – as we learn from the Ten Commandments – "Thou shalt not!" "Thou shalt!" You must not! You must! We must all confess with the Psalmist: **"Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."** (Psalms 51:5)

Jesus' death proves he can do what he says he can do. He had said that he must suffer and die for the sins of all mankind. And the Bible makes it clear that **"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace"**. (Ephesians 1:7) Saint Paul assures us in the Bible: **"Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you."** (Acts 13:38)

Jesus has power to forgive sins. And the forgiveness of sins must be preached in all the world, to all people.

And so, because of your faith in Jesus Christ as your Redeemer, your Savior from all your sins, you have life to look forward to!

You can have the hope, yes, you have the assurance and confidence of eternal life, life in heaven after you die if only you believe this. You can carry with you the hope and confidence, even now, that eternal life is yours!

Repent! Turn from your sins daily! Turn to the resurrected Jesus and believe that there is no sin too great for Jesus to forgive.

He came back to life and you, too, shall be raised from the dead, as you confessed in the Apostolic Creed a few minutes ago: "The third day [Jesus] rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits on the right hand of the God the Father Almighty. From there he shall come to judge the living and the dead."

So what are you going to do with this knowledge? Remember and thank God. Remember and thank God when you enjoy dinner today. Remember and thank God when you wake up tomorrow and the next day and every day.

And what about telling others? Your family members who aren't here? Anyone else from your extended family? Acquaintances? Friends? Jesus gave this command to all who believe in him and follow him: **"Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved."** (Mark 16:15-16)

Tell others this good news, this gospel. That's what the women did, the first ones who saw his empty tomb. They shared the message even though they didn't exactly understand it all just yet.

May we too always be excited enough about this message to share it, to tell others, just as the women did at the empty tomb! Amen.