

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Easter Sunday, April 1, 2018

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

Hymns: 199 189, 193, 191 204

Lessons: Isaiah 25:1-8, 1 Corinthians 15:12-28, Matthew 27:62-28:15.

Sermon Text: Mark 16:1-11.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

You heard today that Jesus rose from the dead. What does that mean for you? Well, you have to first know why he died.

Have you ever done anything wrong? (Pause) The answer would be “yes”. The Word of God, the Bible calls that sin. Sin isn’t a popular word today. None of us likes to think that he or she is doing anything wrong. Other words which the Bible uses for sin are “transgression”, meaning crossing the forbidden line and “iniquity”, meaning failing to measure up to the perfect life that God demands.

We learn about doing wrong, about sin, about transgression, about iniquity from the commandments of God, commonly called “the Ten Commandments”. Christians freely admit that they have broken those commandments in deeds, in words, and in thoughts. And if it weren’t for God’s commandments, what would be our standards of right and wrong?

The Christian admits to sinning daily and much. And that is the reason that Jesus had to die. He paid the price God demands for sin. When the very first humans first sinned, God had assured them that they would surely die. But they didn’t die immediately – or so they thought. They could still breathe and talk, but they were spiritually dead in trespasses and sins, and ashamed that they disobeyed God. But they were no longer perfect, sinless, and holy as God had created them.

God sent his very Son, Jesus Christ of Nazareth, as a true man born of the Virgin Mary, to live a perfect sinless life in our place, for us. And he also sent that perfect, sinless Son to be punished for sin – our sins – and to die for sin – for all the sins of all mankind.

Unbelievable? Yes, unless you accept it by faith. Today we are reminded that

JESUS OF NAZARETH IS RISEN FROM THE DEAD

- 1. This is an undeniable fact,**
- 2. This is an incomparable comfort, and this is an inexhaustible source of joy.**

On Good Friday, three days ago, Christianity commemorated the death of Jesus Christ our Lord. He died on the cross after paying for the sins of all mankind. On Good Friday we read that the body of a dead Jesus was put into the tomb. On that day Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus quickly arranged to put his body in the grave because it had to be done before sunset on Friday, which was the beginning of the Jewish Sabbath, a day on which no work could be done.

Their actions were not done in secret. *“Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses” “were sitting there opposite the tomb”* Matthew 27:61 (NIV) [and] *“saw where he was laid.”* Mark 15:47 (NIV) These *“women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.”* Luke 23:55-56 (NIV)

As the sun set on the day we call Good Friday, Jesus, the Son of God and Son of Man was dead and in the grave. With the hymn writer we lament “O darkest woe! Ye tears, forth flow! Has earth so sad a wonder?

God the Father's only Son Now is buried yonder.” (The Lutheran Hymnal 167:1) His disciples believed he was to have accomplished great things. Now all their hopes were locked in a tomb.

Then Scripture tells us **“When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body.”** Although Joseph and Nicodemus had provided 75 pounds of spices to anoint Jesus' body, these women, friends and believers, wanted to do more for Jesus.

So **“Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, ‘Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?’”** They knew that a large, heavy stone had been rolled in front of the tomb to close it up. This was the way they had of closing a rich man's tomb carved into the rock. The Sabbath passed. Then on Sunday morning, these women would anoint Jesus' body. They were heavy with sorrow. Their best friend was now dead. Then they remember the stone: Who shall roll it out of the way? They aren't strong enough to do it. But on coming to the tomb, **“when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away.”**

Something was wrong. Things weren't right. The stone no longer kept people out of the tomb. **“As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. ‘Don't be alarmed,’ he said.”** The **“young man dressed in a white”** was an angel. Humans don't usually see good angels. Good angels are God's invisible servants except when God wanted to make them visible in the Scriptures. They appeared at Jesus' birth, too. When we celebrated Christmas, you heard that **“the angel of the Lord came upon [the shepherds] and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”** Luke 2:9-14 (KJV)

On this occasion, too, this angel has a special message for these women – and for us – and for all mankind. **“You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.”** Isn't this message the most exciting good news in the history of the world? Jesus, who had been crucified for all the sins of the world, “dead and buried” as we confessed in the creed a few moments ago, is no longer in the grave. He is no longer dead. He is living. He has beaten death. And in that message we who believe in Jesus find incomparable comfort and joy.

This is the Easter message. Jesus of Nazareth, is risen. The Bible assures us that this is true beyond doubt.

The women went into the tomb, but he was not there. The grave clothes were neatly folded. He was gone. The angel asked them **“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ Then they remembered his words.”** Luke 24:5-8 (NIV)

He is living. There is proof of his resurrection. The women did not find him. In our Gospel lesson today you heard how the leaders of the Jews who crucified him tried to seal the tomb, and then lied and bribed soldiers to say his body had been stolen. These women heard the message of the angel who had been sent to tell them this Gospel, this good news.

Men will tell all sorts of lies about the resurrection of Jesus. The first lie was that his body was stolen. But his enemies are one proof that he rose from the dead. As the women were on their way back into the city, **“some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, ‘You are to say, ‘His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.’ So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.”** Matthew 28:11-15 (NIV)

This is a really an undeniable fact, that Jesus is risen according to the scriptures. Beginning on this day and over the next 40 days until Jesus ascended bodily into heaven, Jesus appears to many people: to Mary, to Peter, to the 11 apostles, to Thomas, even to 500 brethren at once!

“Lives again our glorious King; Where, O Death, is now thy sting? Once He died our souls to save; Where thy victory, O Grave?” (The Lutheran Hymnal 193:4)

The fact that he had come back to life is really a message of incomparable comfort. Think of his poor disciples. They had forsaken him and fled when he was taken prisoner. They had heard and even seen the scourging, the mocking, the crucifixion, and knew that he was dead and had been placed into the grave. Where was any comfort for them? How could they know that their sins were forgiven? They would never have known except that the angel sends the message of his resurrection for them.

The angel had more to tell the women. **“Go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’”** Especially Peter had more need of this news than the others. He had boasted that he would never deny Jesus and yet in a weak moment he denied, three times, that he even knew the Lord. He was sorry for his sins. But Jesus was crucified before Peter could confess his sin to Jesus and be told that his sins were forgiven. How could Peter know his sins were forgiven? The Lord is dead. Did you notice Peter’s haste to get to the grave? What should he do now?

What about us? How can I know that my sins are forgiven by God? That message of forgiveness comes from God, from God’s Word. But do we neglect to hear that word of forgiveness which is pronounced here every worship service? Don’t you want and need that message again and again? Or can you go weeks without hearing it? The devil wants that, so that you forget that good news.

How could Peter know his sins were forgiven? How can I know? The Lord is dead.

Notice Peter’s haste to go to the empty tomb. Then notice the good news, the blessed Gospel.

We have comfort of knowing that Jesus lives. We have peace with God knowing that our sins are forgiven because of what Jesus did. We have joy knowing that eternal life is ours simply by believing this!

So it is with all Christians. How do we know we have forgiveness? The grave could have said that what Jesus claimed is false. It could have shown us ‘He is still dead.’ ‘Who could know whether his death is satisfactory to God and whether your sins are fully paid for.’ The grave could have said that he failed to overcome death. But the empty tomb gives us the assurance that we can sing: “I know that my Redeemer lives; What comfort this sweet sentence gives! He lives, He lives, who once was dead; He lives, my ever-living Head.” (The Lutheran hymnal 200:1)

Our sins fully paid for. We need only accept this and believe it to make it ours.

He is alive. Our faith is not in vain. We have a living Savior who passed through death’s valley and lives. He has overthrown the power of Satan. The Bible assures us that **“Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”** 1 Corinthians 15:54-57 (KJV)

Look at the grave, Christian. Look at the grave everyone! It is empty. These women and disciples came sad and downcast, but are now overjoyed. Jesus had been their strength, hope and life, and now he lives forever. How does this affect you? Jesus, who died for your sins, now is risen from death and lives and rules eternally. This is most certainly true!

He is not in the grave. Look where his body was. He is not there. This is the message God gives you. Your body, too, shall be raised from the grave on judgment day. All who believe in Jesus will then receive eternal life in heaven. All who don’t believe that will receive eternal damnation in the fire and unending torments of hell. This is what the Bible teaches. **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”** John 3:16 (NIV) **“We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.”** 1 Thessalonians 4:14 (NIV) **“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life”** John 3:36 (NIV). **“Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”** 1 Corinthians 15:57 (NIV) Amen.