

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Second Sunday after Easter, May 5, 2019

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

Hymns: 210, 207:2, 202, 206:1-3, 211:7.

Lessons: Psalm 16, Acts 2:22-28, John 19:38-20:10.

Sermon Text: Matthew 27:57-28:15

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Our sermon today looks at two separate events. One happened on the day *“after Preparation Day.”* All four evangelists speak of the Preparation Day as the day before the Sabbath, which was to be a special Sabbath beginning the seven-day celebration of the Passover. “Preparation Day” was the day we call Good Friday, the day Jesus was crucified, died, and buried.

On the Sabbath, Saturday, we read that *“the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate.”* They have a special request which really gives us

MORE PROOF – FROM JESUS ENEMIES YET – THAT JESUS ROSE FROM THE DEAD

- 1. The leaders of the Jews tried to assure against talk of a resurrection.**
- 2. But the guards experienced the resurrection;**
- 3. And they were bribed to tell the lie that proved the resurrection!**

What we want to emphasize today is that in this way, Jesus’ enemies even serve as his witnesses, witnesses that he did rise from the dead. We see that the religious leaders of the Jews bribed people to lie about the resurrection.

“The chief priests and the Pharisees” were the enemies of Jesus. For a long time they had been trying to get rid of Jesus. We read in John chapter 7 that at least a year earlier *“many in the crowd put their faith in him. They said, ‘When the Christ comes, will he do more miraculous signs than this man?’ The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering such things about him. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest him.”* John 7:31-32 (NIV) But it didn’t work out for the enemies of Jesus to arrest him at that time. It was not yet time for him to be crucified for the sins of all mankind.

After his death, the leaders were afraid of the truth that Jesus might rise from the dead. So after he died and was buried, they went to Pilate, the Roman governor who had authority in Palestine. Of course, he would have wanted to keep peace! This was the time of the Passover, and there were many, many Jews in Jerusalem who could easily be stirred up. He had seen just that the day before at Jesus’ trials, when the crowd was shouting to crucify Jesus.

Listen again to what they ask from Pilate: *“‘Sir,’ they said, ‘we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.’”*

They address Pilate politely, because they have a favor to ask. It was just the day before this that they had insisted that Pilate crucify this man – Jesus of Nazareth. Today they address him as *“Sir”*.

They recalled – they remembered – Jesus’ words. It is interesting that these enemies of Jesus remembered words that not all of Jesus’ followers remembered. Even after his crucifixion, at the empty grave the angel had to remind the women who first came to the empty tomb of what Jesus had said. We read: *“In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the [angels] said to 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)

The enemies of Jesus call him ***“this deceiver”***. They knew who he was – at least who he was claiming to be – but they call him a deceiver. How did he deceive people? They thought he was a liar. After all, he claimed that he was the Son of God. He claimed that on the third day after his death he would rise from the dead.

Did they forget or ignore Jesus’ miracles, including raising Lazarus from the dead? Lazarus had been dead four days and his body had been stinking before Jesus raised him from the dead. That certainly didn’t seem to be deception. Yet they still call him a deceiver. Matthew tells us that on Palm Sunday, five days before his death ***“The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David,’ they were indignant.”*** Matthew 21:14-15 (NIV) Despite these miracles they call him a deceiver.

Of course, the chief priests and the Pharisees could have claimed that the miracles Jesus performed could have been just tricking the people in some way, perhaps with some kind of fraud. Think of all the explanations people have made for the miracles of Jesus. For example, on occasions when Jesus fed more than 4000 men plus women and children, one explanation to deny that miracle would be that once Jesus tried to feed them, they brought out their own food – kind of like the children’s story Stone Soup!

Even today, unbelievers conveniently ignore truth and facts and try to put their own unbelieving spin on indisputable facts – like Jesus’ resurrection.

Unbelievers also frequently present some story that is unprovable, and repeat it often enough so that people end up believing the falsehood. The lies of evolution are prime examples.

What ***“this deceiver”*** said was that ***“After three days I will rise again.”*** His enemies were afraid that ***“his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.”***

This last deception – pretending and claiming that he rose from the dead just because his body was no longer in the grave – would be worse than the first – that he said he would rise from the dead. His first deception would have been mere words. The last would be a missing body – so-called “proof” that he’d risen from the dead.

To prevent this, they wanted Pilate to ***“give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day.”***

So Pilate says OK, do it. It is easy to imagine the boredom, the disgust, the tone of his voice saying ‘OK, do it if it will make you feel better.’

So at the request of the Jews who were fearful that Jesus’ body would disappear, Pilate ordered the tomb to be made ***“As secure as you know how!”*** That almost sounds like ‘go ahead and try, if it will make you feel better’.

“So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.” A seal and a guard were posted to make the sepulcher secure. We don’t know what kind of a seal, but we’ve probably all seen the kinds of seals that are put on things to prevent people from tampering with them and changing them. Food has seals, envelopes have seals, storage units and even electric meters have locks and seals. To us their actions almost seem ridiculous, because when Jesus was buried, they rolled a heavy stone in front of the entrance to the tomb which was carved out of the rock.

But it didn’t work. Now we come to the second event in our sermon. Listen again to what happened. ***“After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. 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.”*** Matthew 28:1-10 (NIV)

There was an earthquake, an angel appeared, and the guards shook and fell like dead men.

They were not able to prevent what they had been posted there for. The very next verse tells us that ***“While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened.”*** The guards went and told the chief priests the truth.

The worst possible thing they could imagine had happened. A miracle occurred, and the human guards couldn't do a thing about it. So there was obviously a very important council meeting. ***“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.’”***

This is a bribe to lie. The chief priests and the elders didn't want the truth to get out, so they hoped that a large bribe would make their lie seem like the truth.

“So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed.” These soldiers took a large bribe and ***“this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.”*** Matthew 28:11-15 (NIV)

This was a large bribe. But we must realize that if these men were Roman soldiers they were accepting bribes at the risk of their lives. Their story was to be that they fell asleep on the job. Today the results of that could include court-martials and prison time or even execution. And knowing the strict discipline involved among Roman legions, they were risking more than just a slap on the wrist. If they were Jewish guards, there would be no risk if this news would reach the governor. So we must conclude that these were Roman soldiers. But it is almost ridiculous that these guards were bribed to say they hadn't done their job!

But whatever the situation, the leaders of the Jews promised to persuade the governor and keep the guards out of trouble.

Matthew tells us ***“And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.”*** We don't know exactly how much later the Gospel of Matthew was written, but the false story that Jesus' disciples came and stole his body persisted. Believers, followers of Christ, knew otherwise. Believers 2000 years later know otherwise. Christianity has had a far greater impact on the world than it would have if a man died and his followers spread a lie saying he rose from the dead.

And so we see another proof that Jesus really did rise from the dead: To this very day the lies of the guards at the tomb prove the resurrection.

The New Testament makes that all very clear. The Word of God does not lie. ***“For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”*** Hebrews 4:12-13 (NIV) Peter assures us that ***“prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”*** 2 Peter 1:21 (NIV)

And that glorious fact is our joy today, too. We see that God used the lies of these leaders of the Jews and the lies of the guards to prove that the resurrection of Jesus actually happened! Amen.