

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
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**Easter Sunday, Celebrating the Day of Resurrection, March 31, 2024**

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

Hymns: 199, 201:1, 200, 198, 193 :1-4.

Lessons: Jonah 2:1-9, 1 Peter 1:18-21, Luke 24:1-8

Sermon Text: Matthew 28:1-10.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Our sermon text and our Gospel lesson report events of the third day after Jesus of Nazareth, born in Bethlehem, son of a virgin died a horribly painful death on a cross. The horror of the suffering is over but not forgotten.

For many people in Jerusalem, this was simply the end of a Passover celebration. Certainly, there were some things about this Passover that were unusual. There were three hours of total darkness on the preparation day. Lots of people heard about or even saw a terrible crucifixion. Perhaps that was somewhat unusual, although people had been crucified before. This crucifixion was over with and people could go on with their lives.

But what happened at this Passover would affect mankind forever. The death of one man on a cross would assure mankind of something that every human would like to have – to live forever in a better life.

This is a message that I think you have heard many times: Jesus rose from the dead. Today let's look at how

**BELIEVING WOMEN SEEK TO HONOR JESUS**

- 1. They come to the tomb expecting to honor his lifeless body.**
- 2. Instead, they find that he is alive.**
- 3. They will honor him by spreading his message.**

Very early in the morning – at dawn, when it was still dark – several women went to the burial place of Jesus.

Today is the third day since Jesus Christ died a horrible death on the cross.

Two women are named by Matthew. Mark and Luke name other women who had also brought perfumed ointments or spices to anoint the body of Jesus. They intended to honor him in this way, following the custom of the Jews.

They are met by a violent earthquake and an angel who had rolled back the huge stone which had been placed in front of the burial place which had been carved out of rock. The angel even sat on the stone. The angel's *"appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow."* This angel, one of God's invisible creatures made visible for this momentous, earth-shaking event, even talked to the women.

The earthquake was a frightening thing, even for the soldiers who were assigned to guard the tomb. *"They shook and became like dead men."*

The angel has a special message for the women. *"The angel said to 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."*

Just like other times when angels appeared to men, they tell humans "Don't be afraid".

When we find so many things in the world that we could be afraid of, this is a message from God that we need to hear again and again. We don't have angels to tell us this, but God's Word is filled with messages telling us not to be afraid.

On this morning, an earthquake and the appearance of an angel stirred up fear in the women. They didn't really know what had happened.

The mission of the women to honor Jesus in death is set aside. Their intention to clean up and anoint the body is seemingly forgotten. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had wrapped Jesus' body in linen strips and 75 pounds of spices when his lifeless body was laid in the tomb. But now that Jesus' body is gone, there is no need for them to anoint and honor the dead body of Jesus.

So they go away to find his disciples with the message from the angel. They were "***afraid yet filled with joy.***"

But that isn't all that they see and hear.

In addition to the message of the angel, Jesus himself appears to them, to confirm the message of the angels.

***"Suddenly"*** Scripture says, "***Jesus met them. 'Greetings,' he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him.***" This is the man whom they had seen on the cross, suffering and bleeding, whom they had seen die, and now he is talking to them! Jesus now has his glorified body, no longer battered, bruised, beaten, but still with the wounds of the nails in his hands and feet and the spear wound in his side visible.

The word "worshiped" shows that they bowed down before him and praised and glorified him. They clasped his feet, they grabbed on to him, as if they didn't want to lose him again. He was now alive, just as he had promised, although they had obviously forgotten what he had said about his resurrection.

They didn't remember Jesus telling them "***The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life***" (Luke 9:22, NIV84) until the angel told them that Jesus was not in the grave but he was alive. If they had remembered at least one time Jesus had said that, they would not have come to the tomb on this, the third day, to honor a dead body.

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

Jesus himself repeats the message of the angels. Remember that they were afraid yet rejoicing when they saw Jesus.

How often don't we need to be told something more than once? Even important messages? We don't listen carefully, or don't even listen at all. We may not be paying attention when someone tells us something. We may be preoccupied with ourselves and what is happening to us. How often in conversation are we just not listening carefully but are thinking of what we will say next? And especially when something unusual is happening, in the excitement of the moment, we may forget important messages given to us.

When Jesus tells them not to hold on to him physically, we must also think of all the physical things called "relics" that people want to honor and perhaps even worship. Martin Luther was especially troubled about the fictions of all the physical things – fragments of the cross of Jesus, bones of people the Roman Catholic church calls "saints" and other things that Jesus supposedly touched, or things that were somehow associated with things the church considered sacred or holy. Even water from the Jordan River, where Jesus was baptized is considered special or holy by some people.

Even places where Jesus supposedly walked and visited while he was on earth have received special honor. It is really a good thing that Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A. D. and has gone through many physical changes. But for many people, walking the same streets Jesus supposedly walked on, and seeing and visiting the supposed places he was born, or died or traveled is terribly important.

Some people claim to feel a closeness to Jesus in this way, although the actual places are often a matter of speculation and guess-work.

The important thing is not to want to physically touch Jesus or visit and touch places that Jesus supposedly visited while he was on earth. The really important thing is to hear and see him in his Word, the Bible. At Jesus'

transfiguration, Scripture tells us that ***“a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!’”*** (Matthew 17:5, NIV84) Listening to Jesus is the important thing!

So the women hurry to tell the disciples. Luke and John tell us that Peter and John were the first to go and look into the grave. John got there first but Peter actually went into the sepulcher.

But on this day, at this moment, the message to the women is to go and tell his disciples where he will meet them. The angels and Jesus himself told these women to tell his disciples that they are to go into Galilee where Jesus will meet them. The Gospel of John tells us about the meeting in Galilee, when the disciples were fishing.

This resurrection morning is the first time that Jesus appeared physically to his disciples.

We know that Jesus appeared many times to his disciples. Scripture tells us of two disciples walking the seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus on this afternoon, a walk of a couple of hours. Scripture also tells us of how ***“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, NIV84)

The Apostle Paul tells us that Jesus ***“appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, .... Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.”*** (1 Corinthians 15:3–8, NIV84)

But at this point in time, early on the day of resurrection, Jesus appeared first to these women who wanted to honor him. We don’t learn much about these women, but they literally saw Jesus, as did many people before he ascended into heaven.

We didn’t literally see Jesus on the cross.

We didn’t literally see Jesus’ body being placed into the tomb.

We didn’t literally see the angels at the empty tomb.

We didn’t literally see Jesus when he appeared to the women.

We didn’t literally see Jesus in Galilee, where his disciples later saw him.

We weren’t among the hundreds of people who saw him alive in the 40 days after his resurrection when he was still on earth.

But we can see Jesus in the Scriptures, his holy Word, the Bible. We can hear everything he wants us to know while we are on earth. And that is about 1,939 pages in my pulpit Bible. That is about 770,000 words in the King James Version of the Bible. (Yes, someone counted them!) And all those words ***“are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”*** (John 20:31, NIV84)

You have heard that message. He suffered, died, and came back to life so that you, believing, may live forever with him in heaven! Lord, let us continue to honor you by hearing and spreading your message! Amen.

May the message of the Resurrection of Jesus give you genuine happiness today, tomorrow and forever! Amen.