

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Easter Sunday, April 24, 2011

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 191, 192:1-2, 200, 210, 199
Lessons: Exodus 15:1-11, 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, John 20:1-18.
Sermon Text: Luke 24:1-12.
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Please join in singing from The Lutheran Hymnal hymn 2002:

1. 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.

2. He lives triumphant from the grave,
He lives eternally to save,
He lives all-glorious in the sky,
He lives exalted there on high.

You know something for a fact that Jesus' disciples did not know that first day that he rose from the dead. You know because God has told you in his holy Word. You know because the Holy Spirit has worked faith in you to believe those words of God. And you know because you have felt the power of the Word of God in you, comforting you when upset, guiding you when perplexed, healing you or making you feel better when you were hurting. You know that your Redeemer lives. You sang those last hymn stanzas with joy that comes from conviction

When, "*On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb*" those women were ready to honor Jesus. They were going to honor his body by anointing it with spices, by placing spices in the tomb along with it. They had observed the Sabbath day, a high holy Sabbath, because it was the Sabbath associated with the Passover. They did no work on the Sabbath, in accordance with the Old Testament laws given by Moses. They knew where Jesus was buried, because they "*saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it.*" Luke 23:55. Now, on the first day of the week, very early in the morning they went to the tomb. But

JESUS' FOLLOWERS DID NOT FIND THE BODY OF THE LORD JESUS IN THE TOMB.

- 1. Angels explained what had happened.**
- 2. The blessing of the empty tomb.**
- 3. When they remembered what Jesus had said, they rejoiced.**

These followers of Jesus, the women mentioned in the first verse of our text, and named later in our text, did not find what they expected. A terrible week had just passed. One week ago, on the first day of the week

just past, Jesus had been welcomed into Jerusalem with joy, happiness, shouting, singing, palm branches and a grand parade. Many had expected something else from Jesus than what had happened three days ago.

Publicly, until Friday, it would seem that except for Jesus' run-ins on a couple of occasions with the leaders of the Jews in the temple area in Jerusalem, he had had a pretty good week. Scripture tells us that he was performing miracles and healing people; that he was preaching, that people were listening to him, and he seemed to be at the height of his popularity.

But you know what happened on Thursday night after Jesus went to the garden in Gethsemane with his disciples. You know what happened on Friday of that week, three days ago. Jesus was betrayed into the hands of sinful men. Jesus was taken prisoner, was beaten, was scourged, was mocked, was put on trial for some trumped up charges, falsely accused, and finally was crucified. Hours after he was nailed to the cross, he died, three days ago.

Then his body was placed into the empty tomb that Joseph of Arimathea, a well-to-do man, had prepared for himself. It was done rather hastily, as we read in John 19:31: *"Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down."* Matthew 27:59-60 tells us *"Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away."* And we read in John 19:39-41: *"He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid."* The followers of Jesus, the women, had seen his body placed there.

And because they had seen it, they probably knew that Joseph and Nicodemus had already placed a number of spices with it. They came to honor Jesus' dead body, too. But now his body was gone, and they couldn't honor it the way they wanted. What they didn't realize in their shortsightedness was that they and many other Christians – everyone who has believed in Jesus Christ – have opportunity to honor Jesus every day in their lives.

They didn't realize what a blessing Jesus' death had been. And more importantly they didn't realize what blessings the empty tomb meant for them. The angel made it clear that Jesus is not here. He has risen from the dead! The angels remind them of what Jesus told them. And in this message of the angels we are reminded of Jesus' great love for us. He lives to bless me with his love. He, my great high priest is interceding for me at the right hand of the Father in heaven. He lives to guide me, comfort me, and listen to my prayers. And now let's send another hymn of praise to the throne of God in heaven. Please join in singing hymn 200 stanzas three and four.

3. He lives to bless me with His love,
He lives to plead for me above.
He lives my hungry soul to feed,
He lives to help in time of need.

4. He lives to grant me rich supply,
He lives to guide me with His eye,
He lives to comfort me when faint,
He lives to hear my soul's complaint.

The women were wondering about the empty tomb. They were perplexed. They didn't know what to make of the empty tomb. ***"Suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them."*** They understood that these were angels. And they were frightened, not only by the sudden appearance in the previously empty tomb, but by the fact that these were angels, messengers from God sent directly to them. ***"In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men 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.'"***

God doesn't speak to us through angels today, but he did on this occasion, this momentous occasion that changes the future for us who believe and for every human being. Because Jesus lives after he died an earthly death, so can every human being, if he or she only believes in Jesus as the Savior from all his or her sins. So it was God in effect telling them not to be afraid.

In the same way Jesus takes away our fears, wipes away our tears, calms our troubled hearts. Jesus gives us all the blessings we could possibly want. Jesus has all power, for he is our friend, our prophet, priest, and king. Please join in singing hymn 200 stanzas five and six.

5. He lives to silence all my fears,
He lives to wipe away my tears
He lives to calm my troubled heart,
He lives all blessings to impart.

6. He lives, my kind, wise, heavenly Friend,
He lives and loves me to the end;
He lives, and while He lives, I'll sing;
He lives, my Prophet, Priest, and King.

Scripture tells us that when the women heard the angels' words ***"Then they remembered his words"***, that is, words that Jesus had previously spoken to them. Matthew, for example, records for us that Jesus had said ***"We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!"*** Matthew 20:18-19.

Now in order to remember something you must first hear it or learn it or know it. Jesus' public ministry lasted for about three years. We don't know how long these women were with him. But they had been with him long enough to have heard many of his words, to have seen many of his miracles, to learn about him and to know what and who he was. It is likely that you know who Jesus is. He is the very son of God, conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary. He is the Son of God come down to earth to pay the price for all your sins.

You have heard what he has done for you. He suffered and died for your sins. But I am often amazed at what we don't remember. On the way home from church, you parents might ask your children what the sermon was about. In this way, you, too, can review and remember what you heard and learned today. During our special services in Lent, we heard again the history of Jesus' sufferings and death. And how many times have you heard that? I'm sure that in my lifetime that number would be more than 50 times that I have heard the history of Jesus' sufferings and death, drawn from the four Gospels. But I get to study it and read it out loud each year. And each year I see ideas or pictures that I don't remember. But we do need to remember that the devil is always waiting to take away the word from our hearts, so that we may not believe and be saved, as Jesus warns us in the parable of the sower and the seed.

They remembered what Jesus had said. We, too, need to remember what Jesus said. And that is something we want to and need to remember all our lives. Repetition is one way to remember something. Hearing it repeatedly, reading it repeatedly, concentrating on it and even memorizing it all help us remember. When they remembered, they could rejoice. They went and told the other followers of Jesus what they had learned. "***When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others.***" Of course we will be reminded and remember in coming weeks how they reacted. They remembered that Jesus provides everything that they need, including everything they need for eternal life. He will take us safely to heaven. Please join in singing hymn 200 stanzas seven and eight as we remember both temporal blessings and the eternal life Jesus gives us.

7. He lives and grants me daily breath;
He lives, and I shall conquer death:
He lives my mansion to prepare;
He lives to bring me safely there.

8. He lives, all glory to His name!
He lives, my Jesus, still the same.
Oh, the sweet joy this sentence gives,
"I know that my Redeemer lives!"

Jesus' tomb was empty. These women, "***Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles,***" had seen some pretty remarkable things. They had witnessed the tomb in which they had seen Jesus' body laid three days ago which was now empty. And they had seen and heard angels. The angels assured them that Jesus was no longer among the dead. He had risen from the dead. What a great blessing for them and for all mankind this turned out to be!

You have known this for a fact, and they now learned this for a fact. May we never forget and always remember all the blessings this means for us! Amen.