

Sermon for the Resurrection of Our Lord (Easter Day) April 20, 2025 jj
Rev'd Mark B. Stirdivant, Christ our Savior Ev. Lutheran Church, St. Augustine, Florida
✠ sdg ✠

Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

In His three-year ministry, Jesus was the Resurrection Man. He raised the poor widow's son on the road leading out of the town of Nain. All He did was touch the coffin and speak His Words. He raised the 12-year old daughter of the synagogue official known as Jairus. That was the time He brought the house down with laughter when He announced to everyone: She's not dead—she's asleep; just taking a little nap.

When Martha met Him on the road after her brother Lazarus' death (that is, his first death) Jesus boldly claimed to Martha a claim that affects the whole universe: I Am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die. With that, He walked to, even wept at, His best friend's grave, then barked out the orders to his decomposing remains: Lazarus! Come on out! And he did! Lazarus stumbled out, wrapped tightly in grave clothes but he was still alive! A miracle that only the Son of God could do with the Words coming from His mouth.

Yet, all these people whom Jesus raised, eventually they died again. And the holy people who rose from their graves along with the earthquake on Good Friday, they passed away again too.

Now Jesus is dead. It's the third day, and the Sabbath rest is over. The third commandment (Remember the Sabbath Day) was kept outwardly when Jesus' followers stayed home, but their faith in the Lord of the Resurrection was still pretty shaky. They wanted to get to the cemetery first thing the next morning, hopefully before the mob of angry Jews wakes up and takes more anger out on anyone having to do with Jesus.

So the faithful women went their way to the cemetery. Cemeteries are places of death. Many people don't like them, most have terrible memories connected with them. A few like the ones around here have become tourist attractions. And it takes a special, gifted and caring person to work at a cemetery.

You go to a cemetery, a place of death, to pay respects to people who are dead. There are no degrees or steps of death. The farm is bought, the bucket is kicked. Jesus, the preacher of Resurrection and Life, is dead.

That Good Friday, before sundown, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus got Jesus' body down off the cross, wrapped and anointed His body with myrrh and aloes, which was the best they could do until after the Sabbath day, and they hastily laid Him in the tomb.

Now the Sabbath was over, the three women went out with more spices to complete the burial custom. You could almost see them stop short at one point along the way when they all realized they forgot an important detail—the stone at the cave's entrance! How could we have missed it? We can't roll that stone ourselves! Now we have to hope there's somebody there who can help us, or our risky trip out here is all in vain.

But what's this? I can't believe it! The tomb... is open! The large, heavy stone is rolled back! It was sealed too! That could only mean something terrible has happened. A tomb invasion. A break-in. Trespassers have violated the tomb. What if they desecrated, profaned the Lord's body? Or even stole it! Oh, He had many enemies—they could do just about anything. But wasn't it enough that they got Him hideously beaten and crucified? Do we even dare to look inside?

They do. The women stoop down and look inside, peering into the darkness and expecting death, and they're startled! There's no death in here! Two young men appear all of a sudden face to face, and it scares them out of their wits! They're dressed in white robes, but are they trespassers?

No, these are holy angels. Messengers from God. A very strange, and very fearful sight. You don't see angels every day. Every time someone (other than Jesus) in the Bible sees an angel, it scares them, speechless. An angel announced Jesus' birth to Mary; a company of angels proclaimed the first Glory to God in the Highest to the Bethlehem shepherds. They helped and strengthened Jesus after His temptation in the wilderness and during His agony of prayer in Gethsemane. Now the angels are here inside the tomb—they are mighty creatures, full of God's purity—very frightening.

No harm will come. Why do you look for the living among the dead? You're obviously looking for a dead body. That's why you are here in this cemetery! That's why you have a load of spices with you and you were coming to this cave. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified? Do you note the words: Jesus, who WAS crucified?

Well, take a look! The grave is empty, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! He is not here. The Lord who was killed on the cross, died and was buried right here in this tomb they say. He is now risen from the dead!

Friends, as the sports commentators love to say at a certain moment of climax toward the end of an epic struggle, this is the game changer! The salvation game-changer. Because Jesus rose, now His Good Friday sacrifice on the cross has its full power. You have been released of your sins and death because He rose. Your faith in Him is not in vain, and for no purpose.

Why? Because He said He would do it, and He did it! Every detail, Jesus predicted it, and because only the Son of God had the power to accomplish this feat, Jesus proved that He is who He claimed to be.

He said He would be betrayed. Condemned to death. Mocked. Spit on. Flogged. Killed. And the clincher, on the Third Day He physically rose from the grave. Awakened from death. Shed the burial clothes. Folded them up and here they are on the stone bench here inside the tomb, but Jesus is gone! He doesn't belong here in this place of death. He will never die again!

No one else has ever done this! Mohammed didn't, Buddha didn't, not Joseph Smith... not even Elvis! No one, these dead and decaying bodies still remain in their graves. But not Jesus. His body did not see decay. He does exactly what He says. Fulfills all His promises, and most especially, He rose!

Many people saw Him. Hundreds! They knew they saw Him. We read St. Paul's own documentation of this evidence and names the witnesses and the events where people saw the risen Lord. First He appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve...He appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living today (so you can verify with them what I am telling you), though some have fallen asleep, resting in death but with full confidence of their own resurrection. Then He appeared to (His half-brother) James, then all of the apostles (the seventy-two preachers perhaps), and last of all He appeared to me also, as to one untimely born. It is true, Paul says! We have witnesses. The grave is empty. The Lord is no longer dead. Our believing will not be in vain.

The Son of God who died in human flesh for your sins, completed His mission and fulfilled His promise for your salvation. He is who He says He is. He places His stamp of Divine authentication and approval on all the

Scriptures. Because the Bible speaks of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus, therefore the Bible is God's true and without-error Word. His Word may have been written centuries ago, but the Bible still speaks today with Godly authority.

Our Lord's holy and powerful Word leads us to utter fear and awe of God—the way the First Commandment directs when it says you shall have no other gods. No other gods exist! You do not need anything else to trust in besides the God who sent His Son to die for you and then rise from the dead. During Lent you may have used the Ten Commandments, while reflecting on your sins and meditating on the payment Christ made for their remission. But the clincher commandment, the First Commandment yields for you a special blessing for this festival day.

The Law tells us to fear, love and trust in God above all things. And all through Jesus' ministry, as He was getting closer to Good Friday and the empty tomb, He brought awe and overwhelming amazement to everybody who heard His teaching and witnessed His miracles, casting out demons, giving sight to the blind, walking on water, and especially when He raised somebody from the dead. Who is this? People would say. The little girl who was only sleeping? All He had to do was place His hand on her and say, Little girl, arise! Everybody, even bold Peter who always had something to say, was left speechless at His display of utter glory—you could say Peter the rock was petrified into silence!

So it was also here at the empty tomb. There really is no other God. He wasn't lying. It's incredible. Another miracle—the greatest one! The resurrection proves that Jesus, who WAS crucified, is the one and only God Himself.

But the resurrection proves more than God's Law. His resurrection means that Jesus is God, for the sake of sinners! Every one of them, including Peter, one of the worst. He denied

Jesus. Wouldn't be caught associating with Him in the moment of need. Peter failed so badly! He wouldn't fear, love and trust in Jesus above all things. But Jesus died and rose also for Peter. The Lord wanted to tell Peter that He still loves him, always has, and always will forgive him! They are reconciled.

That is why Peter is singled out in the angel's announcement: Go tell His disciples—and Peter, include him too—that Jesus will meet you in Galilee. He will show you His hands and side, those rich wounds yet visible above in beauty glorified. All of them will confess as Thomas did: My Lord, and my God!

Jesus is the God who purchased you with His blood. He won you back, snatched you from sin, death and the power of the devil. He descended into hell to announce His victory and shut down hell's power over you forever. He rose to complete the Gospel that saves you: Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures. He was buried. He was raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures. This is the Gospel, on which we take our stand. He wants to meet you, to give you this salvation personally!

But the crucified and risen Jesus doesn't meet you in Galilee—He's promised to be here, in the Divine Service. As you hear His Word, eat His Body and drink His Blood. Here, He is the one and only God for you. He gives you absolution, complete forgiveness—though you were no better than Peter. You too are forgiven. You too are rescued from the snares of death. Jesus shed His blood for you, as His last will and testament declares: Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.

You shall have no other gods is no longer just a commandment for you—it's also good news! You can put all your trust in the risen Lord Jesus because He will come through for you! You can place all your burdens, anxieties, your hurts over the loved ones you have lost in your life, your sins that weigh you down with the

weight of death—place them all on Jesus, and He will bury them in the grave and leave them there! For Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Cemeteries for believers are transformed from places of death to places of eager expectation for the final resurrection day. Those who are buried, as the Lord said, are just sleeping! Taking their short nap before Christ comes again. They will wake up and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever. And so will you!

He is the Resurrection and the Life! The First Commandment now is fully kept for your blessing. He who lives by faith and believes in me will never die! This is your risen God! This is your living Savior. This is your Easter Jesus.

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.