

Easter Sunday
April 12, 2020
“From Ground Zero to you and beyond!” Matthew 28:7
By Rev. Ed Weber

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior the risen Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this Easter Sunday is from our Gospel reading, Matthew 28:7.

7And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you.”

Here ends our text.

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

I. It always starts at Ground Zero

We look with amazement and wonder at ground zero, where it all started – an announcement by angels to some women...that, that...are you ready for it??
“He is risen from the dead”.

Right now, the best and the brightest of this world are trying to identify ground zero of this Covid-19 pandemic, to try and discover clues on how to stop it. Where did this all begin? Most are pointing to the wet markets in China and members of the congress are calling on them to shut it down...shut down ground zero...so that it can never be the source of such worldwide suffering. As of yesterday, there are over 106,000 deaths worldwide due to Covid-19, over 20,000 now in the U.S. Yes, the U.S. has caught up, unfortunately, and now leads the world with the most deaths...and it is still rising.

New York is now seen as the epicenter of death due to Covid-19 in the U.S., even surpassing the number of lives lost in New York in 2001 from the Trade Tower bombings, at *that* ground zero. Many are saying that today, on Easter, of all days, this virus will reach its peak in the U.S. for the number of lives that it claims.

My friends, we can become fixated on Wuhan, China, or New York. But, the ground zero of world-wide suffering and death always began not in a wet market, but in a garden...the Garden of Eden. There, with the Fall, came the punishment of death...dust to dust. The disease of original sin has spread to every man, woman and child, including you and me, and man can do nothing to stop it.

But, on this day, this Easter day, there is good news that sounds forth from an empty tomb. God did stop it! God stopped death! God overcame death! Ground zero, on this Easter day as always, begins at the empty tomb. Easter cannot be stopped. My friends in Christ, the

empty tomb is where it all starts, or better said, where death ends and life begins. Its where life begins anew! At the empty tomb is where death met its match in the risen Lord. "He is risen from the dead", said the angels. Though church doors may be closed, the tomb is open!!

But this Good News is not just that one Man, rose from the dead. No! The Good News is that all who believe in this one Man, Jesus Christ, the Resurrection and the life, will not perish but have everlasting life! Do you believe this? Yes, Easter is about you, dear listener! It's about how Jesus has overcome *your* death and *your* grave! Continue to listen. *Your* Easter story is as simple as A,B,C ...Do, Re, Mi...1,2,3.

II. The Panorama of Resurrection of Jesus begins at Ground Zero!

Maybe you've had a chance in all your down time to hear a Sound of Music parody of the "Do Re Mi" song, the Covid-19 version. Maria is on a beautiful mountaintop with her guitar in hand and the children are all gathered around her. She tunes her guitar and then begins the song. Now, of course, you probably can easily recall the original version... let me play it for you..."Let's start at the very beginning, a very good place to start. When you read, you begin with A, B, C, when you sing you begin with Do, Re, Mi." And the children echo "Do, Re, Mi". The first three notes just happen to be... "Do, Re, Mi".

Now, the Covid-19 version which has over 7 million views on Youtube, goes like this. "Let's start at the very beginning, a sore throat, a cough in Wuhan, and in no time in all there were...1,2,3...and one went on a plane and took it overseas"...and the children echo ... "overseas." "And that's how pandemics get started you see." "Woe is me", "Woe is me". Now we've got Covid-19...

"Woe is me" "Woe is me!"...Now we've got Covid-19 and the pandemic of death is searching for its next victim...

But, again, there is good news, friends in Christ. For at the tomb, one sees not another victim of the pandemic of death, but one sees the "**panorama of life**". First, one sees angels sent from heaven... eternal spirits who don't die...And then one gazes around the room and sees nothing but stone walls, and the folded burial cloth...But, one does not see death. The lifeless body of Jesus is nowhere to be seen. Because...because...life has burst forth from the tomb!

The **panorama of life** begins at the empty tomb. It's as simple as 1,2,3. Not "woe is me", but "**life for me**"! Take in the sight! Look around. Come and see. Says the angel. See the reversal of all woe! See the elimination of all woe! He lives that so that you who believe in Him will have life also! Death has lost its sting!

III. The Panorama of the Resurrection of life has now been revealed to you

The panorama of life begins at the tomb, but it doesn't stay there. No...Something this good, this amazing, life after death...has to go forth from the tomb. And, that's included in the angel's message. It's as simple as 1,2,3 .

1. "Come and see where they lay Him"
2. Hear the message..."Jesus is risen from the dead and goes before you to Galilee. There you will see Him. Behold, I have told you."
3. "Go now and tell the disciples"

Come, hear and Go!

God invokes our sight, our hearing, our movement, and most importantly...our voices!

1.First, our sight. "Do not be afraid", the angel reassures the women. "for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified." You came this morning expecting to see a crucified body...a dead body. "Come and *see* where He lay". Check it out for yourselves. Look with your own eyes where the **lifeless** laid on the cold hard stone.

Sight. Sight invokes in the depth of one's being both sadness and joy. Tremendous sadness was evoked in the onlookers on Good Friday as they saw their Lord succumb to death. And their sight was not playing any tricks on them. They had watched Jesus' body placed inside the tomb.

And also we hear of the sadness of families in New York and around the U.S. that they can't *see* their loved ones in their last moments of life as they are intubated in the ICU. The last "I love you's" are just texted out most often, without Facetime, or Skype or Zoom. And then, the casket remains closed at the burial for fear of spreading the disease. Seeing the closed casket, but not seeing the body is so hard to accept... that my loved one is no longer living... but it's true.

And yet, now in the empty tomb, could this be a trick? There is no body. We don't see it! And so, our Lord in His great love to remove our sadness and remove all doubt, appears to the women as they returned to the disciples. They saw Jesus. They touched Him, held His feet and worshipped Him. They worshipped the Lord of Life.

Others too would soon see. And their sight would confirm the good news of the women...the Emmaus disciples, the disciples sheltered-in-, I mean, locked-in-a room for fear, later doubting Thomas, later a fish BBQ on the beach and later as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:

“After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.

Yes, the witnesses were there. The witnesses saw the resurrection of Jesus and recorded it for us. How about us? Are you an eyewitness of Jesus resurrection? No, but that's why God doesn't just use sight to prove His resurrection.

Back to 1,2,3 1. See, 2. hear, and 3. go.

2. Hearing. Not only does the angel direct the women to see where Jesus had been laid, but the angel proclaims to their ears the life-giving message... "Jesus is risen from the dead". The Good News came to their ears! And Scripture says that "Faith comes by **hearing**, and hearing by the Word of God". Romans 10:17.

We who haven't seen with our own eyes, the actual physical body of our Lord, can see the risen Lord through eyes of faith, by the power of the Holy Spirit who creates faith by hearing.

When a person is baptized, what creates faith, and new life? The water? No, the Word, the spoken Word with the water, "In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit" a person is baptized. He who believes and is baptized will be saved! Mark 16:16. You who believe in Jesus will rise again!

And this is what you are doing right now. Hearing...hearing beautiful hymns... hearing God's word read by your own lips to each other in your own home settings...hearing this Easter message. The Holy Spirit is strengthening your faith to see and believe that the tomb is empty and that Jesus is alive! And so also you will live!

Let me ask you, does the Lutheran Hour video tape their sermons and devotions? No, it's not about the messenger, but about the message. And, an mp3 audio file is a whole lot easier to share around the world than a large video file! More people have access to it.

When the Shelter-in-place orders were given around the country and church doors were closed, there was a mad scramble to get the video equipment to tape the organist, a lector, a singer, and a pastor, who was going to lead the service, of course, keeping their distance from each other, for all to watch in their homes.

My friends in Christ, that's ok, that's a good thing..but for the Word of God to be efficacious, it doesn't **have** to be spoken AND viewed at a church building! Amazing! Right? You, listener, are the church, not the building! The women at the tomb were the church and the place where they heard the Good News was not a temple, but a tomb!

And God is using this very important time right now, to remind you... that the family service you are having right now, in this intimate setting of your home, is most efficacious to your souls! It's not an either/or of going to church or having home devotions. But a both/and! And God is showing us and leading us right now to make our homes a fortress by His word!

Are you speaking the Word of God in the liturgy back and forth to each other? Are you confessing your sins with each other, proclaiming the absolution of forgiveness to each other? Are you singing the hymns with each other from your bulletins? Are you praying with each other? Are you blessing each other? It's so easy watching a taped service to just be a *passive* watcher and not an *active* participant. But if you turn off the video, you become

the speaker and the hearer! That's what God wants... for you to hear His word and speak it with your lips.

So, the angel spoke the word of God. He delivered the message and then said. "Behold, I have told you". I've passed the baton. You're "it"! Run with the Good News! And, that's when the **panorama of life** opened up beyond the tomb.

IV. The Panorama of the Resurrection of life is now revealed **BY** you to others!

1,2,3 See, hear, and go!

3.Go. It wasn't the angels' job to go and spread the message. No. It started with the women. They were the first carriers of the message that nobody else on the planet earth had heard. They were carriers of healing and life... not disease!

Well, why didn't God choose some clergy or some well-trained missionary to go to the tomb on Easter morning? Because again, it's not about the messenger, but about the message!! The well-trained clergy... where were they? they had...momentarily forgotten the message that Jesus had told them many times, that, after 3 days He would rise. They were locked-in fear in their homes!

So, God worked with the fearless ones, who at least ventured out of the locked home, the women. Are you fearless?

Are you fearless of death, that is, because you too have heard the message that Jesus has risen and that God has sealed you with everlasting life through your baptism? Then, my fearless friend in Christ, you are also chosen by God to be His messenger. 1,2,3 you've heard, and seen by faith that Jesus is alive. Behold, I've told you once more.

And now, you are sent to **Go** and tell the fearful and doubting who are still locked-in their own dark rooms of death, the simple Good News. He is risen from the dead! You've been called to do that, just like the first women, to go and tell the good news! And go, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In this global pandemic, give a call to someone who is in the Panhandle...or in the Hill country, wherever there is life pandemonium going on, tell the Good News that Jesus is risen! Tell them that the Sun of Righteousness has arisen with healing in His wings...that the prophecy of Malachi 4 has been fulfilled!

Jesus heals our sin-filled lives by His death and resurrection. He is truly the panacea in this pandemic for all ills. He is the elixir of life! He is the Resurrection and the Life! "Behold," the angel says, "I have told you". 1,2,3 See, hear and go. Now, go and tell another that...that He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen!

"The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Amen. (Galatians 4:7)