

**The Empty Tomb: A Place of Truth**  
**Easter Sunday**  
**Mark 16:1-8**  
**April 1, 2018**

"Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen!" He is risen. This is most certainly true.

It is just after sunrise when the women are hurrying to the tomb. They bring spices and good intentions: Grieving the death of Jesus, they are going to His grave in order to prepare His body for burial. We note that these women are sincere, dedicated, compassionate, faithful, and far more courageous than the disciples on that Easter morning. But we also remember St. Paul's words from the epistle: "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable" (I Cor. 15:19). The women who make their way to the tomb are most pitiable, because they believe Jesus to be dead. Thus they have no hope.

Here's the good news: Despite their hopelessness, Christ is risen. Their hopelessness doesn't keep Him buried. And risen, He is alive to give them hope.

There's one big obstacle to their mission, and they debate it as they go along: "Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?" You see, if Jesus is dead, there is nothing more that He can do. Therefore, it's up to the women to move the stone; it's up to them to get to Him. They have to do the work if God is helpless. Who will roll away the stone? How will they get to the Son of God?

Here's the good news: Even though they don't know, it is still true that He is risen. He is risen, body and all. Their not knowing doesn't keep Him in the grave. They don't have to get to Him; He will come to them.

When the women arrive at the tomb, they find the stone rolled away. Inside, they find a young man clothed in a white robe; and they are alarmed. That's what happens in the Scriptures when people see angels: They're alarmed, troubled, distressed. Sometimes they fall on their faces as if dead. Angels come from the presence of God, and they reflect His holiness. When a sinner looks upon them, he understands how righteous and holy he is not. He knows how sinful he is. We have no reason to believe it is different with these women: Confronted by an angel, they are amazed and alarmed. They see that he is holy, and they know that they are not. They came to care for Jesus, and now their sinfulness accuses them.

Here's the good news: Despite their guilt and sinfulness, He is risen. Their unworthiness doesn't prevent His resurrection. The fact is that He died because of their guilt and sin; and because He is risen, their sins are forgiven.

That's why the angel says, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him." He was crucified. He is risen. Where the women are alarmed that their sin makes them unworthy before God, the angel declares that sin has been defeated: He speaks of Jesus' cross and resurrection, His death and life. At the cross, Christ has conquered sin, death and devil. His resurrection proves His victory.

The angel continues: "But go, tell His disciples-and Peter-that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you." Ah, the disciples: They're living proof that bravado and good intentions are nothing in the face of evil. The disciples declared that they would stand by Jesus, come what may; Peter was especially vocal. Jesus warned them that this would not be the case; but even with the warning, they still abandoned Him. Especially Peter: His failure was spectacular. He didn't just run away. He denied that he even knew Jesus: Not once, but three times. The eleven have hardly been faithful, and now they've hidden themselves, out of fear that they will be the next to die. Sin, shame, fear, weakness and impending death: That's what the disciples are living with that Sunday morning.

Here's the good news: He is risen. Their failures, shame, weakness and denials do not stop His victory. Furthermore, He is risen to share that victory with them. Note the angel's words: "Go, tell His disciples-and Peter...you will see Him." Not "Go and tell those worthless cowards that they'd better start running away." He calls them disciples and specifies that even Peter is included. Christ is risen; and because He is risen, He restores the disciples from "failure" to "follower."

This is the message that the women are to take to the disciples: Christ is risen, and He is risen to give them life and hope, faith and forgiveness. Sin, death and the grave are all conquered, and Jesus Christ will reign forever. This is the message the angel proclaims and tells the women to tell the disciples. What do the women do? "They went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." The women have seen the empty tomb-there is no body there. They have heard the news of the Resurrection-from an angel, no less! In response to the amazing news, they run away and tell no one, because they are afraid.

Here's the good news: He is risen. Their initial silence and fear to tell the news doesn't change the news that He is no longer dead. He's risen-believe it or not; and by the living Word of God, the silence of the women doesn't last very long. They **will** go and tell the disciples the Good News about Jesus: He was crucified. He is risen. He is no longer in the tomb.

Looking at those characters of that Easter morning, it's a morning like any other. Doing what they think is best, these men and women still suffer all sorts of failings: Unbelief, unknowing doubt, unthinking intentions, alarm, guilt, fear, despair, scared silence and trouble. That's life in this world apart from Christ. But none of these change the objective truth of the angel's message at the tomb. Jesus was crucified-that He might deliver them from these very sins! Now He is risen. The work of His enemies and the sins of His people can't take that away. His enemies are conquered. Sins are forgiven. He is risen.

This is the Good News of Easter: Christ has died. Christ is risen. It has happened. It's objective truth, and nothing you do can ever change that. This is very, very good news.

You live in a world where the Resurrection is made to seem meaningless. Leading voices in society will tell you that religion is true if it works for you. If you believe that Jesus is risen from the dead, then He is risen from the dead; if you don't believe it, then He's not. Live and let live, believe and let believe. This is as nonsensical as it is popular, and few are foolish enough to apply it to anything else besides religion. I know of no one who says that the law of gravity is true only if you believe it; and I know of no one who says that food is necessary for life only if you trust it to be so. The law of gravity and the need for food are objective truths. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is just as much an objective truth; yet you will often be told today that He is risen-but only if you believe that He is. If you don't, then He is still in the tomb. What power man claims for himself! He can keep the Lord from rising simply by denying that it's possible.

To all such attempts to deny the graciousness of God, we simply repeat this joyous confession: Despite the vain, illogical rationales of the world, Jesus is still risen from the dead. The fact that popular spirituality rejects Him doesn't keep Him in the tomb. And risen again, He continues to proclaim His Gospel to all nations in this world, that all who abandon such hopeless reasoning might repent of their sin and believe.

Within liberal wings of Christendom, you will still find scholars who speak of the "myth" of the Resurrection-who teach that Jesus didn't rise from the dead, but that the disciples added the story in to give the Gospels a better ending. They will speak in the most sincere and persuasive voices. They will point to their degrees and diplomas, cite their expertise because of books they have written, and claim to be far more honest than, say, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They will lead many astray, because they tempt their hearers to believe that they are smarter than God; sadly, they will outsmart themselves right out of eternal life.

In response to such pontificating, we respond: "He is risen." Rather than the scholarship of man, we have the Word of the omnipotent God. It is objective truth that Christ is risen from the dead, and all the tedious arguments and novel journal articles of deniers can't keep Him in the grave.

Many around you will seek to deny that you have a Savior; they have no choice in their sinfulness, because they do not believe in Him. You, however, know what to say: "Jesus was crucified for the sins of the world. He is risen from the dead! He is not in the grave, and neither will I be." That response is not a defensive retort. It is an honest confession of the Word of God. Furthermore, it is evangelism, and the Lord is at work to save them in His Word: Whether those around you believe He is risen or not, He is; and He is risen that they might have life in His name.

Of course, it's relatively easy to defend yourself when accusations come from the outside. Grounded in the faith, you expect nothing better from the world. However, it's far more difficult to combat the arguments from within, when your old sinful nature starts whispering in your ear.

Guilt has a way of doing this. Seeing the radiant holiness of the angel, the women were alarmed; even after hearing the angel's message, they still ran away from the tomb, trembling and afraid. But remember: Their alarm and trembling and fear didn't change the truth that Jesus was risen from the dead. Risen, He came to them-forgave their sins, erased their doubts, calmed their fears. So it is with you: At times, because of your sin, the Law of God will leave you alarmed because it speaks the truth of sin and its consequences. Confronted with His holy demands, you will see your guilt in stark contrast and you will be tempted to run away. Running away from the Lord makes sin appear less sinful, like running away from light makes a scar seem less noticeable. But the sin is still there in all of its malevolence, and apart from God there is no forgiveness to be found.

Are you embattled by guilt today? Then hear this news: Jesus was crucified, and now He is risen. Your sin and guilt does not keep Him in the tomb. It can't. Jesus bore them to the cross and destroyed their power there. They couldn't keep Him in the grave; they won't keep you in the grave, either. Now that He is risen from the dead, He does not declare, "I was dead and now am alive; and you'd better run before I get My hands on you." No! Instead, He declares, "I died for your sin so that you don't have to. I suffered for your guilt to relieve you of your shame. I am risen from the dead to give you life. I have shared My death and resurrection with you in your Baptism, and I tell you again this day that you are forgiven." Do not run away from the risen, holy Son of God; for in seeking to conceal your guilt, you will only hoard it to yourself. Instead, hear this joyful news of Easter Sunday: He is risen. The price has been paid for your sin, and the Lord is risen to declare that you are forgiven.

Guilt is not the only tool of the Old Adam: There is also doubt and fear, a numbing exhaustion brought about by struggle, tragedy and illness. There will be times when you are beaten and battered enough that the Lord feels a million miles away, that He seems to have forgotten you. At such a time, remember this objective truth: He is risen. The disciples were despairing that first Easter morning, but their despair did not keep Jesus in the grave. Before the disciples even heard news of His Resurrection, He already declared them to be His

disciples and brothers. He declared where they would see Him, that He would come to them in Galilee. Before the disciples ever saw Him, they had His Word-His Word of objective truth. Jesus, who had died for them, was alive. He was alive for them, and He would come to them.

We speak also of grief on this Easter Sunday, for it seeks to rob you of all hope. The old Adam uses mourning to accuse God of cruelty, using unanswered questions of "why?" to charge Him with faithlessness. When mourning the loss of a loved one, the questions of "why" ( Why this?, Why now?, etc.) cannot be specifically answered, simply because we do not know the answers. But this we do know, and this we proclaim: Christ is risen from the grave, and our grief does not keep Him in the tomb. Risen from the dead, He announces to you this joyful truth and hope: He has conquered the grave. Death has lost its sting, because Christ is the death of death. He is firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. Because He has died and risen again, He will raise His people whom you mourn to eternal life. It is true. He is risen. So He will raise His people to everlasting life.

He is risen. He is risen indeed. Like the women at the tomb, you have not seen Him, but you have His Word: He who remained on the cross for you did not remain in the grave. This is God's truth, and it cannot be changed. Many reject Him; but He is still risen. Many deny His resurrection, but His tomb is still empty.

This is a world of grief and fear and doubt, all tools of sin, death and the devil. But they cannot keep Him in the grave, because He has defeated sin death and the devil. Nothing can change that He is risen. Nothing can reverse His redemption of you. Nothing can repeal this joyous truth: He is risen! And because He is risen, you are forgiven for all of your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen