

A Startling New Reality!

Resurrection of our Lord – 03/31/24 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Mark 16:1-8 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 6, [The angel said to the women,] **“Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; He is not here.”**

Introduction

✘ Christ is Risen! *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

✘ The first words out of the angel’s mouth when the women walked into the empty tomb on that early morning was this, “Do not be alarmed.” “Sure,” you and I are probably thinking, “That would be easy for you to say as an angel.” But then there is reality.

→ Verse eight finishes this text with a description that seems a bit more realistic. “And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.” How many of us, if we had been there that morning, would have acted any differently?

✘ These ladies are trembling, astonished, and afraid. Why? Normally these emotions; this kind of reaction comes because of some kind of tragedy; after a loved one has just died, for example. Is that it?

→ Well, yes; but no! The message they just heard, 1) just came from an actual angel of God, and 2) he just proclaimed, “You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen” (v.6)!

✘ So, let me ask you this: Which would cause you more confusion and bewilderment; to learn that someone whom you loved greatly has just died (many of us have been through that horror – myself included) or to learn that someone that you loved intensely and whom you saw bloodied and pierced and crucified and buried in a tomb not more than 36-40 hours ago, has just come back to life? What would be more confusing – to hear about a death or to hear about a resurrection?

→ You and I both know which of those causes more pain. But what is more unexpected; what is more confusing and frankly, more unsettling?

✘ To those of us who have been Christians for all, or most of our lives, it can seem strange at first when we see people respond with bewilderment and reluctance at the Easter message. But if we take just a moment and really think about what the message of the resurrection actually means, it truly is a life-jarring message – especially if it is the first time that someone hears it.

→ And that’s the point that I pray all of us might seriously consider and share and apply into our lives here this morning; the fact that Christ’s resurrection is a life-jarring; a startling new reality for us all! Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

I. We’re all familiar with death.

✘ These three women that went to Jesus’ tomb early on that third day after Jesus had died were also there at the cross on that dark Friday afternoon. His death brought them great sorrow and disappointment. There is no question that they found it almost impossible to believe that this kind, loving Jesus could be hated; could be killed by the so-called leaders of “their church”.

→ It was likely not the death itself that startled them. They were very familiar with death. At that time in the ancient world, depending upon a family’s station in society 30-40% of infants did not survive and average life expectancy was less than forty years of age.

- No doubt these women had significant and intimate experience at what they had come to do when they encountered the angel there at Jesus' tomb. They were faithfully coming to put spices on Jesus' corpse; the common protocol for handling a dead body in that day. There were no nice, sterile funeral homes and licensed morticians at that time. Whether they enjoyed it or not, didn't matter. They were used to handling dead bodies and they were used to death.
- ✘ Today we spend a lot of money and go to great lengths to have other people make the dead bodies of our loved ones look as lifelike as possible. It's one way to try and help us deal with the pain of death. But as hard as that is, and no matter how much we might try to avoid it, death is still not unexpected for us, is it? Especially when people are more advanced in age, death becomes an all-too-common part of life. The older we get, the more we see many of our friends and family "go" before us.
 - And so, it doesn't surprise us to see or hear of people dying or to learn in the news about sad, tragic ends of life.
- ✘ And the Bible - it doesn't shy away from the stark reality that death comes to all people because all people sin. Romans 6:23 says, "The wages of sin is death." And Ezekiel 18:4 proclaims, "The soul who sins shall die."
 - No, death is not a surprise to any of us.

II. Jesus' resurrection is life-changing for us.

- ✘ But now, let's talk about what is surprising; a great shock to our normal reality. It's the idea of a resurrection! While death is "normal", resurrection is just plain strange to us all. Life coming out of death – having a dead loved one come back to life and walk on this earth in the same body He had before; eat food and talk to people, as Jesus did. Paul said in verse six of our Epistle Reading (1 Cor. 15:1-11) that Jesus "appeared to more than 500 brothers at one time" after He had been raised! Now, that is different. That is startling! I've never seen it. Have any of you? Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*
 - When these women reported to the other disciples what the angel told them, Luke's Gospel tells us that the disciples just couldn't believe it (Lk. 24:11). Honestly, if you had been one of those who heard these ladies return with their report, would you believe it? It didn't seem right: someone rising from the dead?
 - Jesus tried to tell them though before His death that He would rise, but that message did not register; did not make sense to their thinking. A couple chapters earlier, in Mark 14:27-28, only hours before His arrest, Jesus told them on the Mount of Olives, "You will all fall away, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.' But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee."
 - That is why it is significant that the angel reminded the women, "He is going before you to Galilee. There you will see Him, just as He told you" (v 7). This is not God sending His angel to say, "I told you so." But it sets the stage for when Jesus did appear to the disciples. He had to be very intentional and obvious in how He demonstrated to all that it really was Him; that He really did physically; in-the-flesh rise from the dead. Remember Jesus directing Thomas to put His hand physically into His wounds, and Jesus eating breakfast with the disciples on the shore so that they could see that He was no ghost? It really was Jesus! He really did come back to life!
- ✘ And still, I'm sure that the disciples didn't realize right away the huge impact this would have on their lives. They just knew that it now made life really different.

- But later they did come to understand what a startling new reality had been unleashed; what a life-changing dynamic was now affecting every single bit of their lives. And it's the same for every one of us here who believes that Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*
- ✘ Ponder this for a moment, dear Christians, with me. How does this actually impact your life?
- Jesus' resurrection means right now that all of your sin – all of it, is forgiven! His resurrection proved that His death in your place was sufficient to pay for every tiny bit of your sin.
- Jesus' resurrection also means that you, too, will rise from the dead, as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:20: "Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."
- But that's not all, Jesus' resurrection means that everything – and I mean everything about your life right now has changed. First, your life is entirely new now. Where before Christ's victory over sin and death, your future was bleak and dark and depressing, now you have an absolute hope based on the new reality that even death cannot disappoint. Every day right now you live with the certainty that Job inspired in that great Easter hymn, "I know that my Redeemer lives" to "bless me with His love; ... to help in time of need. ... [To] grant me rich supply; ... to guide me with His eye; ... to hear my soul's complaint. ... [To] wipe away my tears," and all the rest. And we can't fail to celebrate that great promise of why the resurrected Jesus returned to heaven ahead of us, right? "...my mansion to prepare" (*LSB* 461:1, 3–5, 7). Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*
- ✘ Personally, when I think of this new resurrection reality revealed here for us by the experience of these women, I can't help but be reminded of so many wonderful, faithful Christians at funerals. In a very real sense, that's what was happening when these three ladies went to prepare Jesus' body for burial.
- Think about the comparison: Those who are grieving gather at the church, often to view their loved one's body for the last time.
- The pain of death; the emotions of grief are a heavy weight. The immediate family and those closest to the person have had to make many preparations in only a few days. It's a stressful time.
- But then once the casket is closed, they come into the sanctuary. Their minds are on the one they are now missing; on how life must go on without that dear departed spouse, parent, sibling or friend.
- But then, they hear a startling message at the very beginning of the service. It begins with Paul's words from Romans, chapter six, "We were buried therefore with [Jesus] by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:4). And the service continues with songs of comfort and assurance like "Amazing Grace" (*LSB* 744) and "How Great Thou Art" (*LSB* 801); often including great Easter hymns like "I Know That My Redeemer Lives" (*LSB* 461). And then, as the preacher proclaims the promises of Christ's resurrection to these grieving believers, God works an amazing miracle! They begin to adjust to the new, incredible reality of death being defeated – for their loved one who died in the faith and for them as well! Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*
- ✘ You see, this is the new life that comes from the resurrection of Jesus; this is how we believers in Christ now approach everything, funerals included – in a new, fresh and glorious way!
- No longer do we need to think in terms of avoiding the reality of death. No more are we concerned about pushing thoughts of Judgment Day out of our minds. These do not frighten or

worry us any longer. Jesus has it all in hand for us. Jesus did rise from the dead, just as He said!

→ In His resurrection, you have the promise of new life; eternal life with our grand and glorious and loving God! It's a new way of life; a wonderfully new way of thinking that is now the norm for us every day, starting today! Why? because of Jesus! He changed everything when He rose from the dead!

✘ By the Holy Spirit's power working through His gift of faith, you can get used to this entirely new way of life. Yours is a new life now, in which the hope and peace of God truly does surpass all of our old human ways of understanding.

→ How is this startling new reality possible? Why can we be so certain about it? Because Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia! Amen.*