

The Holiest of All Days – Christ is Risen!

Resurrection of our Lord – 4/4/21 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Matthew 28:1-10 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 10, “**Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; go and tell My brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me.’**”

Introduction

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

✘ In the sermon series for our Midweek Lenten services we looked a bit more closely at the events of Holy Week: First at the *Three Significant Days* of Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of Holy Week. Then, on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday we focused upon the events of those *Two Holy Days*.

→ Today we have come to *The Holiest of All Days*; to Easter Sunday when we celebrate *The Resurrection of our Lord*. Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

✘ But how can we say this is the “Holiest of All Days”? Remember, the word “holy” means “to be set apart”, “unlike the norm”. Can we really say that this day is any holier than Good Friday or Maundy Thursday for example? After all, there are things that happened on those days that only happened once.

→ Which is why we call them “Holy Days” as well. But this day; I would argue is the day that everything else was building toward. Christ’s resurrection is the climax of God’s salvation plan. Every one of the parts of the plan are crucially important, that is true. If you remove any one part, let’s say Christ’s death for example, or His gift of the Sacrament of the Altar, or Baptism, the plan is then not complete. It’s inadequate.

→ But with Christ’s resurrection, the entire plan now falls into place as God intended. Now death is defeated. Now the receiving of His body and blood in Communion make sense not only as it gives us forgiveness of sins, but also as the foretaste of the eternal feast to come in heaven, because now we know that we too will rise from death as Christ has done first.

✘ So, let’s look at some of the most important points that happened and come out of the events on Easter to make it *The Holiest of All Days*.

I. The Truth Remains Jesus Swallowed Death Whole.

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

✘ Even as we are able to physically sit here and proclaim that joyous truth, it still feels a bit different this Easter, doesn’t it. Our cries are muffled by masks and our sanctuary is not allowed to be even half full!

→ But Christians, know without any doubt that this is the same: the Lord who died for you; the One who shed His blood to redeem you and forgive all of your sins that require death, still declares His most decisive victory over death on this day.

→ Yes death is a reality, it is a fact that every decomposing body still lying in a grave today and every container of cremated remains makes obvious to us all just how big and pervasive sin really is. It conclusively affirms so that no realistic mind can ever deny the extent of how fully saturating sin is within us all, that it is an all-consuming infection that is far more dangerous than any world-wide pandemic disease could ever be.

✘ But still, today we celebrate that Jesus has swallowed death whole and defeated sin fully by dying for you. He has crushed Satan’s head, bringing his power over you crashing down at the

moment that He left the grave empty on Easter morn. Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

- ✘ But still it feels different from a “normal” Easter again this year! Of course, we are all grateful for the technology that allows us to gather many more together with us in a virtual manner on our website as well.
 - ➔ But even as marvelous as that technology is and the way that it helps so many people hear and communicate these glad tidings along with the rest of our family of believers, our glowing screens and scratchy speakers are honestly still a weak substitute for being gathered together as the full Church of Christ in the flesh.
 - ➔ Obviously we miss seeing all of our brothers’ and sisters’ twinkling eyes, cheery smiles, as well as feeling those handshakes and warm hugs and encouraging pats on the shoulder or back.
 - ➔ But more significant is the physical nature of the gathered Body of Christ filling the pews in His church and seeing and hearing the proclamation of sins forgiven with the sign of the cross as Christ’s under-shepherd pronounces the absolution for all. And nothing can compare to a full Sanctuary of saints gathered in place to receive the living body that hung dead for us, now risen for us; and to drink the blood poured out for us, as He pours Himself into us through His Sacrament of grace. “Body risen. Blood flowing. For you; for me. For the forgiveness of sins. O Lord, we pray, let us do it again in full soon ... and often!”
- ✘ This last year has been a sort of extended-Lent as the whole world had to basically stop for the most part and pay attention to what happens in a diseased and collapsing world when it teeters with panic.
 - ➔ We have seen, and many of us have experienced fear and worry as so many other gods, that frankly we might have not even realized we had, have failed us, one by one.
 - ➔ Think about that. What were you depending on and looking to before the pandemic that now has shown that it can’t be trusted? Your health or that of loved ones; your leaders, not only in government, but maybe at work or school or even at home? And what about your internet connection or your computer skills or the fact that you can always just pop over to the store to get things like toilet paper or hand soap or other staples that we have taken for granted.
- ✘ In all of this, you all need to know that Jesus is still the same. Jesus is not dead. He is living and active and present for you. Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

II. It’s an established fact.

- ✘ Supposedly a recent poll revealed that somewhere around 70% percent of people “believe” that Easter is about the Son of God, Jesus, rising from the dead. But at the same time under 50% of Americans claim any kind of regular membership or involvement in some form of religious organization.
 - ➔ The trouble that those divergent statistics show is that anyone being able to know what people mean when they say that they “believe” in something is difficult at best.
- ✘ The term “believe”, by definition is supposed to indicate a “strong conviction” or “confidence in an established truth”. In our faith tradition Lutherans have historically used this phrase over and again, “We believe, teach, and confess...”. That points to the fact that we not only think within ourselves that we “believe” in something, but that we publically proclaim it with conviction and also teach it with confidence to anyone and everyone we can.

→ We say this, of course, about the physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead. But the majority of the world thinks our strong belief in the resurrection of Christ is misguided, foolish, wrong, or even nuts. As even many so-called Christian bodies today say that it's alright to think that Christ's resurrection was only a "spiritual resurrection" but not really a physical rising from actual death, now today's "virtual" world eats up that kind of fuzzy bend upon the truth. Christ's death need be nothing more than a "virtual reality" they think, right in line with the imaginary Easter bunny that lays chocolate eggs.

✘ But Christians, the resurrection of Jesus goes far beyond being just a heart-warming, feel-good set of words that keep old fashioned grandparents or pastors off of your back.

→ It is an absolute truth! It's an established, provable, historic fact. It is not just a matter of faith, but a matter of fact. It's fact, so that you can believe it and have saving faith because of it.

→ Today's Gospel Reading shows us that the resurrection of Jesus is a fact born out by witnesses – the best kind, those who saw it with their own eyes! Mary and the other Mary, then Peter and John, then the other disciples like Matthew who wrote today's text down for us. Later James, and even later still Paul. Best of all, 1 Corinthians 15:6 records that 500 people saw the risen Christ at once.

→ If the resurrection were a fabrication, that is way too many liars to keep their stories straight. Certainly their stories would contradict each other and it would then be the end of that. But they didn't disagree. They all agreed that Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

III. If Christ isn't raised, we're all dead.

✘ Paul lays the ramifications of this truth out for us all to see. He says in 1 Corinthians 15:14, "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain".

→ The bottom line of that would mean, we're all dead – eternally and the point of you even staying here for the rest of the service would serve no purpose at all.

→ If Jesus is not physically raised from the dead, then you *are* fools or nuts, and we are the liars – along with those apostles and 500 guys back in the first century. Yes, those eye witnesses who willingly endured extreme torture and death because they would not stop preaching that they had seen, and touched and eaten with the risen Jesus in the flesh – all of them were just making it all up. And not one of them ever cracked under the pressure to say otherwise. That kind of consistent conviction never takes place.

✘ Let's get personal – if Jesus isn't raised folks, that means you are still in your sins; still dead as a rock; not only unable to save yourself, but also unable to be saved by anyone else. Life, and everything for that matter, is then futile. There's no purpose for anything that you or I do.

→ As Paul quoted the ancient hedonists, the philosophy of life without faith might as well be, "...eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (1 Cor. 15:32).

IV. Seeing the empty tomb "with fear and great joy".

✘ If Jesus was not raised than the women who brought spices would find what they expected – a dead Jesus in the tomb. But there was no dead Jesus anymore, only an empty tomb. The angel announced in verse six, "He is not here, for He has risen, as He said" (Mt 28:6).

→ Four times our text talks about fear or being afraid and one of those times it says the women "departed quickly...with fear and great joy" (v.8). How can it be both of those at the same time?

→ Well, considering fear, think of the massive stone rolled away, how did that happen? What kind of power must be close at hand? And then the brilliant angel shining like lightning with

clothes as white as snow – that would make the bravest person tremble. And what about being afraid that all of this is too good to be true?

→ Thinking of being joyful is easier. Nothing could bring greater joy to the women but to think that their beloved Jesus; our beloved Jesus, who was crucified is alive again! Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

✘ But is it real? Matthew says that Jesus meets the women on the road. Verse nine, “Jesus met them and said, ‘Greetings!’ And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him.”

→ Did you catch the clue that this CANNOT be a virtual reality resurrection here? They took hold of His feet. You can’t take hold of imaginary feet! What a joy! I can’t wait until the day when I will rise from death because of Jesus’ saving work and victory for me, and I will be able to fall on my knees before Him and take hold of His feet and worship Him for the rest of eternity as my God; as the only true God; as the only true Savior from sin, death and devil! Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

Conclusion

✘ This is Easter! Even though things are still not “normal”, there is no need to be afraid of death, even death by a pandemic virus. No, Christ has swallowed up death.

→ So, who is it that has died that you miss today? Who is it that believed, taught and confessed Jesus as their Lord and Savior at their time of death? Because of what we celebrate and know to be true of Jesus today, do not be afraid for you will see that loved one again. You will!

✘ Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!* It’s a fact, recorded in history and confessed by eyewitnesses. It is our conviction and firm belief!

→ As both the angel and Jesus told the women, so He tells you and me today, “Go and tell” (vv.7&10) the others; tell them that Jesus is alive! Tell them what happened on this holiest of all days. Amen.