

Easter 2018 – "Victory!"

Text: Mark 16:1-8

*He is arisen! Glorious word! Now reconciled is God, my Lord;
The gates of heaven are open.
My Jesus did triumphant die, and Satan's arrows broken lie,
Destroyed
hell's direst weapon.
Oh, hear what cheer!
Christ victorious riseth glorious,
Life He giveth--
He was dead, but see, He liveth! (TLH #189)*

Dear Christians, *this* is the day that the Lord has made! Let us rejoice and be glad in it! Amen.

The text for this magnificent Easter Sunday morning is found recorded in the Gospel of Mark, the 16th Chapter, beginning with the First Verse:

ESV Mark 16:1-8 *When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ² And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³ And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" ⁴ And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back- it was very large. ⁵ And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. ⁶ And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you." ⁸ 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.*

These are God's words – the very words of life eternal. That the Lord would grant us the full measure of the joy and comfort contained in these words, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!"** Amen.

In the name of Jesus Christ, our Risen and Victorious Lord, dear Fellow Redeemed:

After so many days and weeks visiting the places of pain and sorrow, on this morning we come finally to the place of healing and joy. After gazing for so long at gloom and darkness, on this day we see excitement and light. After looking for many week at death and despair, today we come to the place of life and hope. Today, at long last, we come to the empty tomb. Jesus Christ *is* risen today. Hallelujah!

If there is a festival of the Church year that can surpass even the rugged comfort of Good Friday, it is this day. Easter is the time of closure and success. That is how we should view this great day. God the Father had arranged a grand and pivotal sign that would stand for all ages. That sign was the tomb. If Christ Jesus remained in that tomb through the third day following his death, then his mission to save mankind was a failure. Then God has rejected his sacrifice, and something remains yet undone in the securing of our salvation. If, however, that tomb no longer plays host to the Lord on the third day, then the celebration can begin, for there we have God the Father's promise that he has accepted the perfect life and innocent death of his Son as the full, holy, perfect payment for the sins of all mankind.

The message of Easter is that the tomb *is* empty. The verdict is in. "Not guilty!" Hear again the words of the angel in our text: **"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."**

All things pertaining to the Christian faith point to this great day, this majestic event. Christmas was but the start of the long and difficult journey. The visit of the Magi, the Lord's presentation in the temple, his baptism

in the Jordan River by John, the Temptation in the Wilderness, the miracles, the anguish in the Garden, and the crucifixion – all pointed to, and found their culmination in, the empty tomb and resurrection of our Lord Jesus.

Jesus has won. Satan has lost.

And the empty tomb *is* the great proclamation of *victory*, isn't it. During the Lenten season, now completed, we recognized the familiar places of our Lord's passion as battle fields– sites where he warred against self-service, temptation, lies, injustice, sorrow, suffering, doubt, and finally death itself. The empty tomb is the proof that he won every single conflict.

Surely this is enough to fill our hearts on this great day. This single fact of the empty tomb is enough to carry us through the worst that Satan can do to us as we live out our time of grace on this decaying, broken earth. Yet, on the basis of our text, we hope to gain yet further plunder from this the Lord's great victory over death and Satan.

Note first the actions of the women on that first Easter morning – observing not only what those who loved their Lord, even in death, *did* do, but what they did *not* do. What they did *not* do was visit the Lord's tomb to embalm his body on the Saturday following his death. Why not? Obviously because such activity was forbidden to God's Old Testament children on the Sabbath. Even though you and I are no longer under the Old Testament Jewish regulations regarding the Sabbath, we can learn something from this simple act of obedience. We find it very easy to justify our own actions and desires on the basis of "exceptional circumstances," even when those actions are contrary to the commands of our Lord. For most of us, anything that I want to do automatically qualifies as an exceptional circumstance.

Not so those God-fearing women. Think how easy it would have been for those women to justify a breaking of the Sabbath because of special circumstances. Their Lord Jesus had, after all, just been put to death. That sort of thing does not happen every day. What is more, a great wrong had been perpetrated by the very same religious leaders who articulated and enforced the rules regarding the Sabbath. Yet note the reaction of the women. They did not regard evil as a justification for further evil. Sin did not justify additional sin. They continued to submit themselves in fear and humility to the laws of their God, knowing full well that one perversion of justice never validates further evil.

Compare their actions with today. A perceived injustice by the police is now regarded as license to loot, burn, destroy, even kill. On a more personal level, have you ever felt justified in sinning simply because you had been wronged in some way? Have you ever felt that it was within your "rights" to break the speed limit simply because you were late for an appointment? Anyone here ever break the speed limit to avoid being late for church? What's wrong with that picture? Where would we be if Jesus had adopted that attitude? One thing is certain – the tomb would not have been empty on the third day.

Interesting also to ponder what would have happened had the women actually broken the Sabbath laws and visited the tomb on Saturday. Had they physically been able to do so, they were obviously prepared to break the seal that had been placed on the tomb and to roll away the stone that had blocked the entrance. The guards would certainly have seen this. What would the guards have reported, assuming they did not try to prevent the women? Can you imagine the doubt that such an action would have raised in the hearts of men to this very day? Jesus' followers were seen tampering with the tomb and the body the day before they claimed he rose...

And what would the women have found had they entered the tomb on Saturday? They would have found the lifeless body of their Lord. How different the Easter story would have been.

Yet those God-fearing women did *not* visit the tomb on Saturday in violation of the Sabbath. They waited until Sunday morning, and they were blessed with a glorious sight they would never forget – the tomb standing open and an angel announcing the resurrection of their Lord.

The next lesson we should gain from the actions of the women on Easter morning is also revealed in our text: ***"Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they said among themselves, 'Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?' But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away; for it was very large."*** Simple doubt could easily have ruined that splendid first encounter with the empty tomb. The women had seen the stone that was rolled in front of the door. They had no doubt that they could never move it on their own. They were not deterred.

What is the message for us here today? The answer is a question each of us need to ask ourselves: *How many times do I block or prevent spectacular events in my own life simply because I preclude, or fail to consider, God's help and power in the face of difficulty?* Our tendency is to quit before we even begin, whenever the odds seem against us, whenever the goal appears to be too difficult for us to accomplish on our own. We then compound the failure by considering ourselves wise and full of foresight, when the reality is that we have left the power of our God out of our calculations. The women indicated that they had no idea how they were going to remove the stone, and still they carried on. God provided what they could not. Their reward? It is recorded there in our text. They were the first human beings to witness the empty tomb, to actually see with their own eyes the fact that Jesus had been raised, and they thereby took their place in the history of the greatest event known to man.

These women gave us tremendous examples, but there is a reason God tells us never to follow the example of others blindly. Human beings fail. In fact, it is remarkable how difficult it is to think of even one Godly person mentioned in the Bible that did not also, in some way, fail. Abraham demonstrated tremendous faith, but then passed his wife off as his sister. Moses, who had that intimate connection with God, failed to circumcise his own sons, and was prevented from entering the Promised Land because he struck the rock the rock instead of speaking to it. David sinned with Bathsheba, Solomon turned for a time to other gods, Samuel failed in the discipline of his children, Peter denied his Lord, James and John wanted to call down death on those who opposed them, Paul persecuted the Church. It's no wonder God tells us not to put our confidence in man.

So too these great women were not perfect. In fact our text records with the following words their one great failure on this morning: ***"(The angel said to them,) '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.' So 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."*** In this our great and honorable women failed miserably. Not only did they have spectacular news to share with the disciples, they had been commanded *by an angel of God* to spread that news. Yet what did they do? They kept quiet. Why? Because they were afraid. No doubt their fear was also mixed with confusion and doubt. Their minds could not yet fully grasp, fully comprehend, all that they had just witnessed, so they simply kept it to themselves.

Here we do not want to be like those women; but, unfortunately, here is where we can be most like those women. The very same message that was given to them has been given to each one of us. The risen Lord Jesus said to each one of us in Mark 16:15: ***"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."*** For whatever reason, we, like those frightened, confused women, have kept silent when we should have spoken. We prejudge the obstacles in the path of our witnessing as too great for us to overcome, too oppressive to move, and we do nothing. Say nothing.

On this morning, the empty tomb inspires us to greater and more faithful service in the Lord's Kingdom. Today we simply let the joy of this occasion, the relief of this victory, fill our hearts to overflowing. Tomorrow, we go back to work – not just to the office or home or school. Tomorrow we carry on our duties as Representatives of our Risen Lord Jesus Christ. Let the magnificence of this great event, the resurrection of our Lord Jesus and the promise of Life Eternal that the empty tomb proclaims, perfect and invigorate your holy desire to share the meaning of this day with the rest of the world. One soul at a time. This news, this *victory* over sin, death, and Satan, is just far too valuable to keep to ourselves. Amen.