

P Christ is risen!
C He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

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

Today we hear that some women came to the tomb of Jesus. When they found it empty, they are confronted with the question that I think we all need to be confronted with when we come up empty in our expectations, “*Why do you look for the living among the dead?*” Then the women were reminded that while Jesus was still in Galilee, he told them that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again. However, in the emptiness of *their* expectations, there is recognition that comes on the heels of someone proclaiming the Good News of new life. And that Good News is that Jesus is not dead, He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Once again, I begin this proclamation on this glorious day with the closing words of a sermon I remember reading some time ago. A sermon that Martin Luther preached on Easter Sunday morning, March 28, 1529. I mention it again because *it is* what today is all about. On this glorious day, as we *remember* these words...that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again, we too remember and celebrate what God has accomplished through His Son Jesus Christ and what that means for each one of us. This recognition of new life among the dead is what Luther lifts up in his sermon. Luther writes:

Thus sin is completely taken away in the Resurrection. Everyone should learn this today, that all of us should abandon thoughts about ourselves and should not pass judgment on ourselves (or others) according to our feelings. For this is contrary to Christ and the Gospel, which says Christ has taken away the sin from our hearts and consciences and laid them on himself. For this reason, the apostles praise the resurrection unceasingly.

We should also do (the same) because the flesh is too evil, Satan too powerful, and the conscience too slow for us to learn to look at Christ and not ourselves.¹

Learn to look at Christ and not ourselves...we are dead to sin but through Christ, we have the promise of new life. But even knowing this, we continue to glorify ourselves and seek glory in what we do and NOT what God has already done for us through Jesus Christ...yes, we continue to seek the living among the dead. Nonetheless, Christ is risen and because he is, we are too! And this is not to say that we are raised because we have done something to deserve this, we are assured forgiveness and salvation because God has given salvation to us through the death of His only Son Jesus Christ.

What a glorious blessing we have received through the faith that has gathered us all here today to celebrate this glorious victory over death...this victory over sin. This is the blessing we all share and celebrate this day with Jesus Christ through faith. So welcome to all who have gathered to remember and celebrate the resurrection of our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I think I can safely say that we all know that through God’s grace we are justified before God through that faith...through our belief in God. But this belief or this faith is not automatic. Today

¹Irving Sandberg and Timothy Wengert, *The 1529 Holy Week and Easter Sermons of Dr. Martin Luther*. Concordia Academic Press, St. Louis, 1999, page 127.

in our appointed Gospel lesson, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and other women go to the tomb, they encounter two men in gleaming clothes and the men remind the women what Jesus had told them...

that the Son of Man must be handed over to *sinners*, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again. (Luke 24:6)

The men ask them to remember the very Words of Jesus and it is in this moment of recognition they left the tomb and returned to tell the eleven apostles and others what they had seen and what they had remembered. But as the women return to tell the others, their words are but an idle tale and the others do not believe them. So, as I stand before you all today, in this very moment, just as these women stood before the apostles and others, I say to you...the women found the tomb empty...Christ is risen...just as he said he would, do you truly believe this? The women at the tomb remember what Jesus said to them, but what is our moment of recognition? What does it take for us to believe? We have his words...but do we really believe these words?

It seems as though words today have become malleable. Someone makes a statement and the words are scrutinized and then altered to suit others' sensitivities, or they are flat out denied as false. Or we have those who say if I don't see it with my own eyes then it never happened or existed. Before technology stepped into our culture and our world, we relied on the honor of a person's word and we remembered and honored that word. Jesus didn't have a Facebook page or a twitter account, he had followers who did not alter or augment the story to suit themselves. The followers of Jesus told the story and they told it in a way that did not elevate themselves but proclaimed the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the one who was handed over to sinners, crucified, and on the third day rose again. And this Good News was told in an unaltered way, no matter if it was viewed as an idle tale or offensive to a Pharisee or a ruler of any kind.

We have the written testimony of faithful followers who remembered, who recalled what Jesus said and did. And this is what has been passed down through the ages beginning with the very women who became the very first human beings to preach the Good News of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But woe is me. It seems I am preaching to the choir; you all have come here today. You all have come to hear of the Good News of Jesus Christ, you all have gathered around this very table to taste and to partake in the bread of life and the cup of salvation that is this Holy Eucharist. Of course you believe. But now what?

The physical presence of Jesus is not here...He is risen! What will *we say* when we leave this tomb? If we do believe this, do we depart from this tomb, this gathering and return to our homes, our families, our friends, our workplaces, and social gatherings and say nothing? Do we say nothing out fear that others will think our story about Jesus Christ is just an idle tale that no one could possibly believe this outrageous and unimaginable tale? Do we say nothing because of the hurt and the damage that the church has unleashed on people over the years and we don't want to add to the pain and hurt? Or do we, in order to avoid criticism, tell of a Gospel that reflects our own desires and understandings? In other words, do we tell of a Gospel that aligns with "my" values, my understandings, my likes, and my dislikes...do we tell a tale that amounts to nothing

more than bad theology and bad history but does not offend others and most certainly glorifies me? Do we seek meaning and purpose from things in this world that do not give life?

What I am attempting to say is this, our faith and our Easter recognition does not come from this place or the people in it...we are all dead or we will be one day. Where we find life is in the Word, the Word that is proclaimed here today that says...He is risen, He is risen indeed! We find the promise of new life in a simple piece of bread and sip of wine that we do in remembrance of the One who's very presence is with us in this Holy Meal. The One who promised that He will be with us until the end of time.

In this Holy Word that is proclaimed from this pulpit and is administered in this Holy Meal is Jesus Christ, whose resurrection completely takes away our sin. We have been blessed with the grace of new life that springs forth from such a horrible situation and comes to life among us when we remember and give thanks and praise this day amidst our skeptical and divisive world that may cause us not to remember or recognize it at all. What will we say or do from this point? Will we go out in fear and shame...will our world seize our thoughts and tongues leaving us to say nothing because we are afraid or embarrassed?

We are living in times that seek the living among the dead...in that we reject doctrine and tradition and gravitate toward a teaching that suits our own desires and we turn away from listening to the truth...and we turn away from this Holy Word and view our Holy Eucharist as a foolish ritual...and in doing so...we forget the grace that is shown to the world through Jesus Christ and the grace given through our faith in the promise of new life made known to us in Word and Sacrament that is Jesus Christ.

Our hope is easily dashed by disappointment, and our insight and discernment is confounded by blindness, skepticism, and false rhetoric. Amidst all of this...the church is the grave, the tomb we all stand in at this moment. But through our faith, we are here in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus remembering the words he promises to us all...the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again. He did not simply rise from the dead; he rose from the dead for us and for our inheritance of His glory just as St Paul reminded the church in Ephesus:

¹¹In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹²so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴this is the pledge of our inheritance towards redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:11-14)

Today, on this glorious Easter morning we remember and we celebrate this reality...Christ is risen, and because Christ is risen, our sin is completely taken away. May we like the women at the tomb be moved to proclaim without reservation, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.