

HE HAS RISEN

Mark 16:1-8

The Resurrection of Our Lord (Series B)

April 1, 2018

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The gospel lesson for The Resurrection of Our Lord comes from *The Gospel According to Mark*, chapter 16, verses 1 through 8. It is on page 722 of the pew Bible. In this gospel lesson, Jesus ... well, Jesus doesn't show up. He's not where he's supposed to be. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Mark 16, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

¹ When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, 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.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Easter. The technical and more descriptive name for this holy day is "The Resurrection of Our Lord." It's that glorious and triumphant day when Jesus the Christ rose from the dead. It's certainly a happy thing. Imagine if something like this happened to someone close to you. Someone you love dies. You plan a funeral and start making arrangements. But before the funeral occurs, your loved one wakes up from death and escapes from the funeral home. What a happy thing that would be! Life would be restored, but things wouldn't just go back to normal. Things would be better than normal. Instead of planning a funeral, you would plan a party. It would be a real "celebration of life." You would maybe even throw a party every year to remember it. I mean, if we have parties to celebrate our birthdays, I'm pretty sure we would have an annual party for someone who came back from the dead. It just seems like the right thing to do.

So Jesus' resurrection is certainly a happy thing. But it's not just his family and friends from two millennia ago who had a yearly celebration. No; we're talking about, probably, a billion or more people all around the world celebrating this two thousand years later. Why? What makes Jesus' resurrection so special? I mean, Jesus isn't the only person to come back from the dead. There were other people too. Jesus raised his friend Lazarus ([John 11:44](#)), a little girl whose

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father's name was Jairus (Mark 5:42), and a widow's son (Luke 7:15). In the book of Acts Peter raised a woman named Dorcas (Acts 9:40), and Paul raised a young man named Eutychus who dozed off during his sermon and fell out of a third story window (Acts 20:9-10). In the Old Testament, the prophet Elijah raised a widow's son (1 Kings 17:22), and Elisha raised a child too (2 Kings 4:35). It's not like these raisings happened all the time. We can count all of them on two hands. So it was really big news when they did happen, just like it would be big news today. But we don't have yearly remembrances of Lazarus, Dorcas, and Jairus' daughter being raised from the dead. There's something different about Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

There are a few historical differences. First, Jesus prophesied that he would be crucified and would rise again (Matt. 12:40; 16:4; Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34; John 2:19; 10:17-18). That's certainly different. It's one thing to be raised from the dead. It's a whole 'nother thing to talk about it before you're even dead. Second, with all those other raisings, there was always someone else who performed the miraculous feat. Whether it was Jesus, Peter, Paul, Elijah, or Elisha, there was always another person there, bringing the dead person back to life. But that didn't happen with Jesus. It was by the power of God directly that Jesus was raised. We can even say he was raised by his own power (John 10:17-18). And third, while we assume all those other people died again, Jesus didn't. You might have noticed that I referred to all those other people coming back to life as "raisings," while we refer to Jesus' coming back from the dead as a "resurrection." I don't know if the words really mean anything different, but we try to distinguish between Jesus and all those other people, because Jesus' resurrection is permanent. He was raised from the dead, never to die again. So there are some historical differences between Jesus' resurrection and all those other raisings, but the primary reason we celebrate Jesus' resurrection every year is because of what it accomplishes.

His resurrection accomplished three things. And write this down. If you're a confirmation student taking notes, write this down. If you don't have a pen and paper in front of you, write it on the wrinkles of your brain, and when you get home, write it down on paper. The resurrection of Jesus the Christ accomplished three things. First, it proved that Jesus is, in fact, the Son of God in human flesh. Second, it proved that God Father accepted his sacrifice on Good Friday for the sins of the world. And third, it opened eternal life to all who believe in him.

So first, the historical question. If what we just read from *The Gospel of Mark* is true—if it actually happened—then it changes everything. If it is false, then Christians are the most pitiful people in the whole world (1 Cor. 15:19).

On several occasions Jesus claimed to be the Son of God in human flesh (e.g., Mark 14:62; Luke 23:34, 46; John 2:16; 6:32, 41; 8:54, 58; 10:25; 14:2, 6; 15:1; etc.). He also predicted, numerous times, that he would rise from the dead (Matt. 12:40; 16:4; Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34; John 2:19; 10:17-18). So his resurrection is the proof that he is who he says he is—the Son of God in human flesh. So our faith in him is completely dependent on the historical fact of his resurrection.

This is what Paul taught us in the epistle lesson from 1 Corinthians 15. And, by the way, if you get a chance today—and I hope you'll just make time for this—read all of 1 Corinthians 15. It's better than any Easter sermon I can give you. But in the section we read, Paul reminds the Corinthians of the most important points of the gospel. And he states four things. It kind of sounds like a creed. First, "that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures" (1

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Cor. 15:3). Second, “that he was buried” (1 Cor. 15:4). Third, “that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:4). And fourth, “that he appeared to [a whole bunch of people]” (1 Cor. 15:5-8). So there are these four critical events: Jesus died, was buried, was raised, and appeared.

And when we think about these four events, we realize that two of them are really the key events and the other two are the proof that those events really happened. The two primary events are that he died and was raised. And these are the two events Paul says were done “in accordance with the Scriptures.” And by “the Scriptures” he means the Old Testament, because the New Testament was just starting to be written. So the first primary event of the gospel is “that Christ died for our sins.” Then the proof that Jesus was really dead is his burial. And we think of all the different things that happened after he died. There was that spear thrust into his side (John 19:34), and the blood and water flowed out. This was the crude Roman way of confirming that a crucifixion victim was really dead. Their lungs would fill up with water, and they would literally drown. That’s how crucifixion victims typically died. So when the spear punctures the lungs and blood and water flow out, it confirms that the crucifixion worked; the person is dead. So the Roman centurion confirmed for Pilate that Jesus was dead, and Pilate granted the corpse to Joseph of Arimathea for burial (15:45). And Joseph carried the corpse, wrapped him in a linen shroud, and laid him in a tomb (15:46). This whole burial thing confirms the first part—that Jesus died. And this is important, because for a resurrection to be confirmed, first the death has to be confirmed.

Then the second primary event of the Gospel is “that he was raised on the third day.” And the proof of this is that Jesus appeared to a whole bunch of people. The proof of Jesus’ resurrection is not limited to the empty tomb, though that is part of the proof, and it is substantial proof, especially since there were guards posted at the tomb (Matt. 27:65-66). But the strongest proof is that Jesus appeared to a whole bunch of people. Paul mentions Cephas—that is, Peter—and the rest of the twelve, except, of course, for Judas, because he betrayed Jesus and was dead before the resurrection. And the names of all the disciples are recorded in the gospels. This is important because it identifies the eyewitness by name. And Paul mentions that Jesus appeared to a group of more than five hundred people at one time. That size of a group is way too big for it to be a hallucination or anything other than a real resurrection. And Paul mentions that most of these five hundred people were still alive when he wrote 1 Corinthians (1 Cor. 15:6). The effect of the statement is, *If you don’t believe me, go and ask them.* Then Paul mentions James (1 Cor. 15:7)—that is, the half-brother of Jesus—and all the apostles. And then, finally, Jesus appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus (1 Cor. 15:8; Acts 9:5). The gospels and Acts give us even more names of eyewitnesses, including Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Salome, Joanna, Joseph—who was also called Barsabbas and Justus—Matthias, and Cleopas. It’s really a long list of eyewitnesses.

Imagine the case of Jesus’ resurrection being tried in a courtroom. And there’s this big, long parade of eyewitnesses. And they all have their stories of seeing Jesus after he was raised from the dead. Unless you’re just totally hung up on the whole “miracles aren’t possible” thing, which is rather closed-minded, the evidence would be overwhelming. Combine that with the Romans and Jews being totally incapable of producing any evidence of a dead body—a body which was in their custody—and you’ve got a slam-dunk case. Jesus really did rise from the dead.

And this accomplishes three things. First, it proves his claim that he is the Son of God in human flesh.

Second, it proves that God the Father accepted Jesus' sacrifice for the sins of the entire world. This is what we talked about last week. And if you weren't here last Sunday, I want you to go to our website and listen to the sermon from last week, because this sermon really depends on that one. Last week we considered the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, which is really the highpoint of Jesus' ministry. And that actually makes last week the highpoint of the Church year. We tend to think of Christmas and Easter as the highpoints of the Church year, but that's not quite right. It was really last week, so I want you to get caught up. I guess I already gave you some homework—to read 1 Corinthians 15—so we'll call this make-up work. It'll take you twenty-six minutes, but even busy people can find an extra twenty-six minutes.

So the resurrection of Jesus Christ is really the conclusion to the crucifixion. Jesus said he was going to the cross to suffer and die. The purpose was to bear the sins of the world and offer himself as a sacrifice. So then he dies, and he's laid in a tomb, and we kind of think to ourselves, *Did it work?* If Jesus just continues to lay in the tomb—if his body never rises, but instead decomposes—then we would kind of be left in suspense. In fact, we would probably assume that Jesus was just full of it. He would be like the magician who saws his assistant in half and can't put her back together. He would be an incompetent fraud, and we would conclude that our sins are not, in fact, forgiven.

So the resurrection is the glorious confirmation that it worked. God the Father accepted the sacrifice and is pleased with his Son, so he exalts him by raising him from the dead. The sins which he bore in his body are now gone, and we are truly forgiven. So the resurrection of Jesus proves the forgiveness of our sins, which he purchased for us on the cross.

And the third thing Jesus' resurrection accomplishes—and this goes beyond proof; it actually does something substantial—it opens eternal life to all who believe in him. Since Jesus has borne the curse of sin and death in his own death, the curse is removed, and he has opened eternal life to us through his resurrection from the dead. This means that he will give to us the exact same thing he received in his resurrection. He will give to us the resurrection from the dead. And notice that we're not using the word "raising" here. We're using the word "resurrection," because we will be raised like Christ—perfect and incorruptible in both body and soul (1 Cor. 15:20, 42, 49, 53).

I want you to think of that funeral again—you know, the one you were planning for your loved one, but we pretended it didn't happen. In our experience, those funerals always take place. They don't actually get interrupted by raisings. We take the corpses of our loved ones and we lay them in the ground. And if Jesus doesn't return in the near future, the same thing is going to happen to us. Someone will take our bodies and lay them in the ground. And when we see that casket lowered into the ground, that kind of seems like the end of things. So we tend to comfort ourselves by saying, "She's in a better place now." And for the soul that falls asleep in Jesus Christ, that's true, and it is comforting to know that the soul is in the presence of Jesus.

But that's not really our eternal hope. That's just our temporary comfort, because our eternal hope is much better. Our eternal hope is that Jesus Christ is going to return, and he is going to call these dead bodies out of their graves. Your mother, and brother, and sister, and

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husband, and father, and grandfather, and son, and daughter, and so on, and so on, will rise from their graves. Jesus Christ is going to call them out, just like he did for Lazarus, Jairus' daughter, and the widow's son. But the dead will not merely be raised. All of Jesus' believing saints will be resurrected and transformed in both body and soul. And this is our eternal hope. The curse which we experience in this life will be completely reversed. Immortality and perfection will reign forever and ever. Our bodies will not suffer disease and decay. And our souls will not suffer the temptation to sin. Sin, death, and the devil will be vanquished forever, and we will have no cause for weeping or sorrow.

All of this is because Jesus rose from the dead and lives and reigns for all eternity. His resurrection proves that he is capable of doing this, and it opens eternal life to all who trust in him. Amen.

He who testifies to these things says, **"Surely I am coming soon."** Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with [you] all. Amen. (Rev. 22:20-21)