

HE IS CRUCIFIED. HE WAS RAISED.

Mark 16:1-8

The Resurrection of Our Lord (Series B)

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Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

Ny Stavanger Free Lutheran Church, Buxton, ND

The gospel lesson for The Resurrection of Our Lord comes from *The Gospel According to Mark*, chapter 16, verses 1 through 8. 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!

Life. That's what Easter is about. That's what the Resurrection of Jesus is about. Life. Jesus lives. He was dead. He rose from the dead. And now he lives forever. It's about life, his life, and the life we have in him.

But we are preoccupied with death. We are alive now, sort of. That's our perception of this life, anyway. Our perception is that life comes first, followed by death. We live for a while. At some point we start drifting toward death. And eventually we die. We all see this big ugly freight train at the end of the tunnel, and we want to avoid it. It concerns us. We're preoccupied with death. And death is bad. It is to be avoided. God's will for us and for our neighbors is not death. But there's something wrong with our perception of life and death.

We think we are alive now. That is only partially true. We live under the curse of death. Even as Christians who have been raised to new life in Baptism, we still suffer under the curse of death. And the natural perception of reality is that life comes first, followed by death. That is not even partially true. It is completely false. In the resurrection of Jesus we see that death actually comes first, followed by life, real, incorruptible, eternal life. Instead of viewing our current existence as life and a slow march toward death, we should view our current existence as death, awaiting the sudden inbreaking of life. Instead of being preoccupied with death, we should be preoccupied with life, because life is what Jesus has promised us, and life is what Jesus has earned for us.

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Jesus has defeated for us our enemies of sin, death, and the devil. These are our three great enemies. And we're going to zero in on the enemy of death. Jesus has defeated death. And how did Jesus defeat death? The obvious answer is, *By his resurrection*. But the obvious answer isn't always the right one. Jesus defeated death at the cross. That might not be what you expected, so I'll try to explain. All three of our great enemies—sin, death, and the devil—Jesus defeated them at the cross.

The most obvious of these is sin. We are sinners. “We are by nature sinful and unclean,” and we have sinned against God by our thoughts, words, and actions. And “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). We deserve to be punished because of our sins. So Jesus paid for our sins at the cross. Thus he defeated the enemy of sin.

But he also defeated death and the devil at the cross. The devil's greatest power is—or I should say *was*—the power to accuse us of sin. That's literally what the name “Satan” means. It means “accuser.” And with sin paid for, the devil has lost his power to accuse. He still lies, and he still deceives, but there is no real authority behind anything he says. He was stripped of his power at the cross when Jesus atoned for sin.

And Jesus also defeated death at the cross. The apostle Paul says, “The sting of death is sin” (1 Cor. 15:56). That is, death gets its power from sin. He also says, “The wages of sin is death.” That is, death occurs because of sin. We die because of sin. It is our nature, and we perpetuate it by our sinful actions. If there were no sin, there would be no death. So Jesus defeats death by atoning for sin.

Both death and the devil get their power from sin. So Jesus defeats both of them by atoning for sin. Sin is the king pin. If you knock it down, the others fall behind it. Where sin is paid for, death and the devil lose their power.

So as Christians, we never put the cross in the rearview mirror. We always hold it before our eyes. It is our salvation. One of our best deathbed or funeral hymns says, “Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes” (“Abide with Me,” 601). In life and in death, we look to the cross, because the cross is the source of our salvation.

Scripture does not allow us to put the cross in our rearview mirror. Jesus does not put the cross in his rearview mirror. He continues to be, for all eternity, the crucified one. Even in Revelation, where Jesus is revealed as the king who has conquered all things, he appears as “the Lamb who is slain” (Rev. 5:6, 12; 13:8).

The angel who greeted the women at the tomb does not allow us to put the cross in our rearview mirror. He says, “You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who *is* crucified” (16:6). Most English Bibles translate the angel's words as, “... who *was* crucified” (ESV, NIV, KJV, etc.). And that's true. He was crucified. But it doesn't capture the full meaning of the word. Greek has different kinds of past tense verbs, and here the angel uses a special kind of verb that indicates an action that took place in the past, but has special ongoing significance. It's the same kind of verb we talked about on Thursday night when Jesus says from the cross, “**It is finished**” (John 19:30). It's a completed action that has special ongoing implications. Christ's redemption remains finished. It wasn't something he went through just to get it over with. It is his crowning work. So it's translated, and rightly so, “**It is finished.**” His work was finished, and it remains finished for all eternity. So the best way to translate Jesus' word from the cross is, “**It is finished.**”

Well, it's the same kind of verb here, when the angel says, “You seek Jesus of Nazareth who *is* crucified.” It's not simply that Jesus *was* crucified on Good Friday, and now that he was raised from the dead, that's over and done with. No, that crucifixion has eternal implications. It's kind of interesting that when the angel speaks of the resurrection, he uses a simple past tense verb.

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The best way to translate it is, “He was raised.” The event that gets the special kind of verb, the one that emphasizes the ongoing implications, is the crucifixion. “You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who *is* crucified. He was raised. He is not here.”

Even after his resurrection Jesus remains the one who is crucified. We don’t mean that he is still in the act of being crucified. The event is in the past. Rather, we mean that the crucifixion identifies Jesus as Savior. He is the crucified one. In next Sunday’s gospel lesson we will hear that Jesus still bears the marks of the crucifixion on his body. Jesus is, for all eternity, the crucified one. That’s because the crucifixion is the action by which he defeated our three great enemies of sin, death, and the devil.

So what’s the point of Easter then? If the cross is the source of our salvation, if the cross is the complete victory, then what’s the big deal with the resurrection? Well, the resurrection is the natural consequence of the crucifixion—it’s kind of like the conclusion to the crucifixion—and it is the proof that it worked.

Jesus’ resurrection proves three basic things. First, it proves that Jesus is, in fact, the Son of God in human flesh. Second, it proves that God Father accepted his sacrifice on Good Friday for the sins of the world. And third, it proves that we will be raised with him.

But before we consider these three things which are proven by the resurrection, we should consider a little bit of the proof for Jesus’ resurrection. How do we know the resurrection actually happened? If we don’t know that the resurrection actually happened, then it doesn’t actually prove anything. Our Christian faith is completely dependent on the historical fact of Jesus’ resurrection.

That’s why it is so significant that we have eyewitnesses of the resurrection. First, there were eyewitnesses of his death, including Roman soldiers puncturing his side with a spear (John 19:34). You can’t have a legitimate resurrection unless you have a real death, so there are eyewitnesses of his death. It was a very public event. And then there are many, many eyewitnesses who saw him alive following his resurrection. We have all eleven of the remaining apostles, and we have their names, as well as the women who first saw him in the garden where the tomb was. We have their names too. We also have some of the names from those in the larger group of disciples. And in the epistle lesson we read from 1 Corinthians, Paul reports that Jesus appeared to more than five hundred at one time, most of whom were still alive (1 Cor. 15:6). We don’t have all of their names; that would be a lot of names, and this would become a very boring sermon. But the effect of that statement is, *If you don’t believe me, go and ask one of them*. At that point in history, you could just go to Galilee—that’s our best guess of where the appearance to more than five hundred occurred—you could just go to Galilee and ask for an eyewitness to Jesus’ resurrection. And if the random person you ask wasn’t an eyewitness, they could probably point you to someone who was. Or you could go to the church in Jerusalem, and there were certainly eyewitnesses there.

So we can envision 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.

So back to the things which Jesus' resurrection proves: First, the question of Jesus' identity: 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). Those are really big claims, and they require really big proof. The proof Jesus offers is that he will be crucified and rise again. So his resurrection is the proof that he is who he says he is—the Son of God in human flesh.

Second, it proves that God the Father accepted Jesus' death as the sacrifice for the sins of the entire world. 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 a 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.

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. The resurrection of Jesus proves the forgiveness of our sins, which he purchased for us on the cross.

Remember, Jesus' crucifixion was the victory over death. And so the resurrection is simply the natural consequence of the cross. The sting of death is sin. The reason we die is sin. The reason Jesus died is our sin. But his death atoned for that sin. And now that that sin is atoned for, there's really nothing left to hold him in the grave. Death no longer has the power to hold Jesus down. It's like we sang, "Death in vain forbids him rise" ("Christ the Lord Is Risen Today," 104). He rises from the dead because death has no hold on him. The cross stripped death of its power, and the resurrection is the proof of it.

And the third thing Jesus' resurrection proves is that we will be raised with 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. This means that he will give to us the exact same thing he received in his resurrection. There's nothing left to hold us in our graves. Jesus will give to us the resurrection from the dead. This is that sudden inbreaking of life that we are waiting for.

When we say that death comes first, followed by life, we don't mean that life actually comes the moment a Christian dies. When a person dies, body and soul are separated. The souls of God's children enter into his presence. We don't know a lot about this state, because this isn't really the thing we're waiting for. In the midst of mourning, we can rejoice that God gathers the souls of his saints to himself. But we are still waiting for something better. We are waiting for the thing that happened to Jesus on the third day. And Scripture speaks much more about this event: the resurrection of the dead. All of Jesus' believing saints will be resurrected and transformed in both body and soul. 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,

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death, and the devil will be vanquished forever, and we will have no cause for weeping or sorrow. This is life.

We have confidence in this because Jesus, who is crucified, rose from the dead and lives and reigns for all eternity. His resurrection proves that the cross is the victory over sin, death, and the devil. It is our victory. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.