

John 20:1-18
"Hope and Certainty"

The Resurrection of Our Lord – Easter Sunrise (6:30 and 8 a.m.)

April 1, 2018
First Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ! Amen!

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! {He is Risen, Indeed! Alleluia!}

"And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain... But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead!" (1 Corinthians 15:14, 20a)

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! {He is Risen, Indeed! Alleluia!}

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Christ Triumphs]

Before the Communists seized control of Russia, it had been a long-established custom for relatives and friends to exchange verbal Easter greetings.

But when the Bolsheviks took over Russia, they wanted total control of thought and mind. Anatoly Lunatscharsky, the Bolshevik commissar for public education, delivered a public lecture in a large Moscow auditorium. He said that the Christian religion was now completely overthrown and that the Bible could easily be disproved. He felt so sure of himself that he challenged anyone in the audience to find a flaw in what he had just presented.

A young priest came forward, turned to the audience, and said, "Brethren – Christ is risen!"

With one accord, the vast audience cried out, "He is risen indeed!"

The priest then said, "I have finished. I have no more to say."

Immediately, the meeting was closed. Fast-forward to today, communism did not destroy the Christian church in Russia. As the church in Russia was persecuted, it only became stronger, because as things turned bad, only Christ gave hope.

[Where's Jesus' body?]

On that first Easter day, Christ's disciples did not know what to expect. For many of them, they thought all hope was lost. They saw their friend, Jesus, taken away on Thursday – then die nailed to a cross on Friday.

Yes, Jesus told his friends what would happen, but they still didn't completely understand.

“Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb” (John 20:1).

What would you do if you were Mary? Likely, you would do what Mary did. She was shocked! Where did they take Him? She must tell someone!

“So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him!” (John 20:2)

Mary's first thought was that grave robbers have taken away Jesus' body.

Now, grave robbery was common during this era. It was so bad that Emperor Claudius eventually ordered capital punishment to be given out to those convicted of destroying tombs, removing bodies or even displacing the sealing stones.

But, when Peter and John arrived, they realized that the linen cloths were still there.

What grave robber would leave expensive linen and even more expensive spices?

When John saw this, he believed, but he and the other disciples still did not understand the Scripture. Then Peter and John went back to their homes.

[Why wasn't Jesus in the Tomb?]

But Mary Magdalene stood weeping outside the tomb. She still didn't know what to believe. She then saw two angels who asked her, ***“Woman, why are you weeping?”*** (John 20:13a)

She responds: ***“They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him”*** (John 20:13b).

Then she turned and saw what she thought was the gardener. The man said to her, ***“Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?”*** (John 20:15a).

You see, Mary thought this man was involved in moving Jesus’ body. But, this man questions her saying: ***“Whom are you seeking?”*** It is likely this man is asking Mary, why wasn’t Jesus in the tomb?

Jesus did say over and over again that He would die and rise again, but they did not understand. He also said that their sorrow would turn to joy.

She responded: ***“Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.”*** (John 20:15b)

Then the man spoke, ***“Mary.”*** She immediately knew this man was Jesus and she believed.

[Little Faith]

The disciples were slow to believe, just as we, too, can be of little faith.

If you were in that moment, how would you react to Jesus’ missing body? Would you be just like Mary questioning where they took the body?

Or would you be hiding out in a locked room, like the other disciples, out of fear that you could have the same fate as Jesus?

Unlike those disciples on that first Easter morning, we know the result of Christ’s death on the cross. For it has all been given to us through the Holy Spirit in God’s Word found in the Scriptures.

Yet, we can be of little faith, even with this knowledge.

Instead of coming to the Divine Service every Sunday to be with fellow Christians and receive God’s grace that increases our faith, we find other things to do.

Instead of reading God's Word, we find ourselves caught in the affairs of the world.

Instead of following the Triune God, we find ourselves following the world and its values.

We may begin to think, "Ah, well, my sin isn't that bad. At least I didn't do what that guy did."

But for God, all sins of thought, word and deed separate us from His love.

It doesn't matter if you use God's Name in vain, betray or hurt your neighbor's reputation, or support the murder of unborn children – sin is sin.

We may rank sins, as not so bad to awful, but for God, all sin is equal to the next sin. For Satan, every sin brings you closer to him and that is his evil desire.

For us – living in 2018 – Satan has a definite grip on the culture at large. He has turned what is good and God-pleasing and warped it as evil. He has turned wrong into right.

But the good news is that when we repent of our sins and follow Jesus we are forgiven. Because Christ is risen from the dead, we know that this world is not the end. For we know that we are all strangers here. We live in the world, but we are not of the world. With hope and certainty, we know Christ has prepared a place for us – because He has said so.

As Christians, we live a particular way. We live knowing of hope. We live knowing of truth. We live knowing of certainty.

[Christ Is Risen!]

This hope and certainty is what we are celebrating this morning! For Christ, who was dead, is alive!

Christ is Risen! {He is Risen, Indeed! Alleluia!}

Because Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, He alone has destroyed the power of sin, death and the devil upon everyone who believes and trusts in Him. Also, all Christians are now given the gift of sainthood, while at the same time a sinner.

We became holy through our Lord Jesus Christ, at which the Holy Spirit gave us faith at our Baptism. Christ covers us and wipes us clean of all our sins and shortcomings. This is what makes us saints.

To call yourself a saint is no presumption but an act of gratitude and a confession of God's blessings.

We are made holy by grace through faith – only through Christ's life, death and resurrection. As holy people, we still sin against God. This is why God gives us His Means of Grace – His nourishment – which forgives us our sins and strengthens our weak faith, through Confession of Sins, Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper. This is why we come to the Divine Service. You see, without God's nourishment, we become frail and starve. Our faith is on life support. We wander looking for something to replace the one true God.

Instead, be like Mary Magdalene and say: ***"I have seen the Lord!"*** (John 20:18) For you see Christ at each Divine Service when He forgives you and strengthens you with His Means of Grace.

So, let us all rejoice in knowing that our faith is not in vain! Christ is Risen! He is Risen, Indeed! Just as He said! Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.