

Easter Sunday            3/31/2024  
St. Mark 16:1-8            B

***"DO NOT BE ALARMED. YOU SEEK JESUS OF NAZARETH, WHO WAS CRUCIFIED. HE HAS RISEN; HE IS NOT HERE."***

In a cemetery in London, England, a great tree grows out of the grave of Lady Anne Grimston, who died well over a century ago. It seems Lady Anne did not believe in life after death, so she ordered that her final resting place be a vandal-proof, reinforced stone tomb, covered by a huge slab of marble. Square blocks of stone, fastened to each other and to the marble slab with heavy iron clamps, plus an iron railing, were intended to prevent any tampering.

For many years, Lady Anne and her tomb were all but forgotten, until a passerby noticed that the marble slab had moved slightly. A sapling had sprouted, and its roots had found its way between a side stone and the upper slab. Slowly but steadily, the tree grew until it burst open several of the iron clamps and thrust the marble lid aside. Today, the heavy slab rests against the trunk of the massive tree. Lady Anne's extra-ordinary precautions were all in vain. No one can close her open crypt.

Over 19 centuries ago another tomb was made as secure as people knew how. Every precaution was taken to prevent entrance or exit from this freshly-hewn grave that had been cut out of rock. Once the corpse was placed in the tomb, a heavy rock was rolled in front of the entrance. The governor ordered a detachment of soldiers to stand guard, and a seal was placed on the stone bearing the authority of the Roman government.

And yet, less than 36 hours later, that Jerusalem tomb was found open, the stone rolled back, the guards were gone, the seal broken. Most

pointedly, the lifeless body was missing. This fact, that there was no body in the grave, draws us here this Easter Day.

On that first Easter, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome found that tomb empty. Three short days earlier, before their horror-stricken eyes, their Savior and Master had been crucified as a common criminal. He had breathed His last and given up His soul in death. In the purple twilight of that soul-shattering Friday, emotionally bruised and battered, in what little time they had, they laid his lifeless body in the grave. Because the Sabbath was quickly advancing at twilight that Friday, they had no time to give their Friend's body a proper burial. There was only time to tenderly place His mortal remains in a tomb provided by Joseph of Arimathea.

And so, in the light of early dawn after the Sabbath had ended, they came to lovingly clean, and wrap, and provide a proper burial for Jesus. At the tomb, they did not find the corpse of their Friend, but the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. The angel said to them, *"Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; He is not here."*

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! He who was so shamefully put to death is gloriously alive again. Today, as we celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord, we join the faithful women at the tomb to hear from a heavenly messenger glad tidings of great joy which brings us life, comfort, and hope.

This Easter dawn we rejoice that Christ's resurrection has burst open the portal of the tomb for us. Christ lives, death's reign is done. Rejoice and be glad, **FOR THE EASTER RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHIRST HAS DESTROYED THE LAST ENEMY, DEATH.**

God, in His love, created the perfect home for us. In the Garden, God gave us everything we needed. God wanted us to live eternally and to simply enjoy this gift of life He had given to us. But, we fell in sin. Because of sin, we were cast from Paradise. Now, in this valley of the shadow of death, we earn our daily bread through painful toil and the sweat of our brow. We are subject to disease, illness, accident, strife, malice, envy, and gossip. Sin changed the Paradise of Eden into a vale of tears.

But, the worst is yet to come. The Bible teaches us, *The soul who sins shall die (Ez 18:4)*. The wages of sin is death -- not merely the death of our mortal bodies, but spiritual death, the eternal death of hell!

The Good News of Easter is that God had pity on us when He saw us enslaved to sin, death, and hell. He took it upon Himself to rescue us.

God sent His only-begotten Son into this sin-enslaved world, and laid on Him the sins of every sinner, to battle sin and overcome it. The sin of the world condemned Jesus, nailed Him to the cross, killed Him, and, at last, buried His body in the grave. In the darkness of that Friday, it looked as though the all-destroying tyrant, sin, had swallowed up and conquered even our Savior from sin. But, No! *"He has risen; He is not here."*

The resurrection of Jesus Christ has defeated death. *"Death is swallowed up in victory,"* the Apostle Paul writes (1 Cor 15:54-57). Through the resurrection of Christ, the power of sin has been removed, death has lost its sting, and the gates of hell broken down.

Jesus took on our sin and death, and He freely gives us His death, His Easter resurrection from the grave, and His eternal life.

That is exactly what happened in the new birth of our baptism. We died with Christ and rose with Christ. The Apostle Paul writes these words in the book of Romans:

*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized in to Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ... For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His...Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him (Ro 6:3, 5, 8).*

Our baptism is our own resurrection from the dead. Christ lives. In Christ, we live. In our baptism into Christ, we have been made alive. On this Easter morning, as we see that the grave of Christ empty, we know that our grave is empty. As we see Christ alive, we know we live, today and for all eternity, in Him. *"Because I live, you also will live,"* the Savior promises (Jn 14:19).

This is our hope as we face death ourselves, and it is our comfort as we face the death of our loved ones. The Easter resurrection enables us to look past death and the grave to eternity in heaven because Jesus has conquered death and risen for us.

I'll let you in on a little secret. I am an avid Miners sports fan. I enjoy watching our young people compete in sporting activities. One of the great things about being a fan, is that when the team wins, the fans win. When the Miners girls' softball team wins, when the basketball team wins, the football team wins, the baseball team wins, the fans win. We win. The fans stand and cheer with gusto, "We win!" because when the team wins, the fans win.

Therefore, My Fellow Redeemed in Christ, Do not weep. Do not be sad. Fear nothing – not even your greatest enemy, death itself. On this most blessed Easter Day, do only this one thing -- REJOICE IN THE EMPTY TOMB OF JESUS! Today, we cry in triumph and victory, "We win!" before the empty tomb of our risen Savior! He has conquered and the grave has lost its sting. His resurrection is our resurrection. We win!

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.