

April 4, 2021

Mark 16:1-8 and Psalm 118:23, 24

“This Is the Day That the Lord Has Made!”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is recorded in all four gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). It is absolutely critical to understand that all four gospel accounts are historical narrative and eye-witness testimony. We have what people saw and heard and touched and counted as historical fact. We have their recollections of events that many others saw with them. Many witnesses would have been able to corroborate what was written. We also have commentary that helps us to understand in many instances what it all means. Either one believes the eye-witness testimony or they do not. What they proclaim to you is what they want you to know and trust so that you may share in the joy that they have.

Like any eye-witness testimony collected from multiple witnesses who were privy to a shared event, there will be differences - not contradictions - but differences in what they will say or write. These differences arise because of where they were at the time and how they participated in the shared event. More differences come because you have different personalities who will emphasize one thing and not another. This is why there are differences in the gospel accounts. But these differences are not by any stretch of the imagination irreconcilable. In fact, they can often be easily explained when you put the clues together. Moreover, we believe that the Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit and is without error.

I have said these things to you so that you may trust the gospel accounts. There are so many today who do everything to attack and destroy the Biblical record. There are so many books and magazines and media that attempts to reduce the resurrection to nothing more than a fairy tale. Those who rage against Jesus do everything they can to disturb and destroy the new or weak Christian with many arguments that seem credible on the surface. Do not be deceived! We must all learn to test the spirits rather than simply accept what the so-called experts have to say. Hold fast to what you have received in the apostolic Scripture, the good news that has been preached to you, and by which you are being saved! The apostle Paul boldly writes in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8,

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

This Easter, the appointed gospel lesson is from Saint Mark who wrote down the memories of the apostle Peter. It is a short but straightforward testimony revolving around three women who go to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. The use of spices for anointing was not to embalm the body and preserve it but to help alleviate the smell and stench of the decaying body. It was a loving service. It also showed that these women believed that Jesus was truly dead. They were at the cross and they watched from a distance when he was placed in the tomb. The fact that these are women lends great credibility to the truthfulness of the account, for in those days one would hardly make up an account dependent upon the testimony of women. That they were chosen by the Lord to visit the empty tomb first reveals much about their value.

Furthermore, this account shows that they are clearly not anticipating the resurrection. In fact, they show how they are like us, for they have everything they need but then it dawns on them that there is the obstacle of a very large stone. Our lesson records, “And they were saying to one another, ‘Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?’” They were also unaware of the Roman guard that was stationed there by Pontius Pilate. The Roman guard, which would have consisted of a group of men, would have been able to help, or they may have refused the women since the tomb had been sealed.

The heart of the account rests in the announcement of the young man (an angel) sitting on the right side of the tomb, dressed in a white robe. He said to the women: “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. 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.” The women should have known that Jesus would rise from the dead. In other words, they should not have been alarmed, or dumb-founded by what they were seeing at the empty tomb. If we keep in mind what is revealed to us in the gospel of John, when they looked at the place where Christ had been laid, they would have seen wrappings there in such a way that Jesus had disappeared through them, leaving them intact with his body mysteriously gone.

What the women see and what they hear from the angel takes us to the heart of our salvation. The one who was crucified has risen from the dead! By faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus we are counted righteous. Paul writes in Romans 4:25 as follows: Jesus was “delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.” He died for our sins no matter how many or how great they may be. He died for all our sins and even for those that we think are too great for him to forgive. This is how we view the sufferings of Jesus. He suffered for us and, not only that, he also rose from the grave that we might live. These truths must be believed. What Christ has done he has done for me ... he has done for you ... he has done for us! Luther writes:

But when I come to understand the fact that all the works God does in Christ are done for me, more than that, they are bestowed upon and given to me, the effect of his resurrection being that I also will arise and live with him; that will cause me to rejoice. This must be brought home to our hearts, and we must not merely hear it with the ears of our body nor merely confess it with our mouth.

It says in our gospel lesson for this morning that the women “... went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.” This is truly a picture of the Christian life. They fled the tomb. They feel the death they die with the Lord Jesus. Notice the extraordinary combination of emotions that they experience. They are “trembling” as is the case for all of us when confronted with the reality of the death of Jesus for our sins and the tomb. They are also “astonished.” The Greek word for astonished is the same word that we use for ecstasy. They are amazed and swept away in a feeling of overwhelming happiness at the thought of Jesus being alive. And they are afraid as anyone is when subject to death but also in the face of immortality. They say nothing, that is, they do not rush out and speak in hysteria, but remain composed, and will go to the disciples and Peter to tell them what has happened.

Luther writes: “When the heart has been conquered, the Word unites this poor heart to Christ and leads it gently and quietly from hell and from sin, although the soul still feels sin and imagines to be still under its power.” So it was for the women and so it is for us. A conflict begins. We still have sins within us, but only to lead us to the exercise and growth of faith so that the conscience might be soothed with the good news again and again, and that it might become calm and satisfied as the surging waves of sin and death subside. This was the conflict in the women. It is the conflict in us so that sin and death might finally give way to the rejoicing that is found in the resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus guarantees (ratifies) that our sins have truly been forgiven and death no longer has any hold on us. The women are in the day that the Lord has made. We are also in that day. It is a day which is everyday in the Christian life.

It says in Psalm 118:23-24, “This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” These words of the psalmist are about the death and resurrection of Christ. It is the day that should be truly everyday for everyone. It is a day that we should never grow tired of living until we are forever with the Lord. Let every day be a day where we go to the tomb with Jesus. Let Easter be the every day that we are raised in Him. And let us rejoice and be glad in it, for the angel has said: “He has risen; he is not here!” And let us fix our thoughts toward the place in which we will see him as he is and be transformed in his glorious likeness. In that day we will see him just as he has told us! This is the day. He has made it. We are in it. We look forward to it. We are already and ever shall be with the Lord Jesus our Savior and King - today by faith and in another day faith fulfilled! Indeed, what the eye-witnesses proclaim to you is what they want you to know and trust so that you may share in all that they have!

This is the Day that the Lord Has Made!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott