

Ascension Lutheran Church

Pastor Godkin's Sermon for the week of April 12, 2009

Jesus is Faithful to His Promises (Mark 16:1-8)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text is from the 16th chapter of the Gospel according to St. Mark:

“He said to them, ‘Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; His 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.’”

This is the text.

Dear friends in Christ, when we were last together on Good Friday it was a solemn meeting. We heard that that our Lord had died. We heard that He was buried, that His disciples mourned for Him. We also heard Jesus' Word of promise before His death. He said, “I lay down my life that I may take it up again” (Jn. 10). Jesus made this prediction over and over but for some reason with the disciples it never sunk in before He died. To Peter and the other disciples He had explained that He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.” (Mt. 16). Jesus even said, “I am the resurrection and the life” when He raised Lazarus from the tomb. At the time Jesus' words made no sense to the disciples. For in the moments following the crucifixion they thought His death was the end, just a tragic defeat. They didn't quite understand that Jesus' Word to them was prophecy which must be fulfilled.

And here we are Easter morning, the third day since Jesus' death. We are here to celebrate His resurrection. For He has risen just as He said He would. We hear this Good News each year. In fact, each Sunday is like a mini-Easter; to celebrate the life we have in Christ. We have grown accustomed to this message over the years; perhaps sometimes not fully appreciating the wonder of this event and the supreme blessing for which it is. For the disciples on that first Easter morning, it was almost completely unbelievable. They had doubts. The women, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Solome went to the tomb to pay their respects and to anoint Jesus' body with spices. They were expecting to see His body. The resurrection was not on their minds. Yes, it seemed that Jesus' words were all but forgotten.

But Jesus had not forgotten. An angel was sent to remind them. When the women looked in the tomb they found only a man in a white robe, who Matthew's Gospel says was an angel. He told them the startling news: “You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; He is not here.” This was confusing to hear no doubt for the women and yet it was the best news in the world. The empty tomb meant that Jesus had kept His Word, that He was alive again.

The angel then says to them, "Go and tell His disciples and Peter that He is going before you to Galilee. There you will see Him, just as He told you." Friends, the key words here are, "just as He told you." When He says something, when He makes a promise, He keeps it, He fulfills His Word.

We see His Word fulfilled during the Passover week leading up to His death especially. He had shown that He is faithful to His promises. The disciples found a donkey for Jesus' triumphal entry just as He had said would happen. The fig tree didn't produce fruit and withered just as He said it would; The Passover meal He had with His disciples on the Holy Thursday was prepared in Jerusalem and arranged in the large upper room just as He told them it would be; two days before the Passover Feast a woman anointed Jesus with perfume while He was in Bethany. Jesus said, "She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial".

Later that Friday, His Word again was fulfilled as He died and was buried in the tomb. Jesus said His disciples would abandon Him, that Peter would deny Him three times and that Judas would betray Him. All these things happened just as He said they would happen. Everything that He said would happen, happened. And His resurrection is the ultimate proof that Jesus is faithful to His promises. And here we see another promise: Even though His disciples abandoned Him Jesus would find them again and show Himself to them in Galilee. He is faithful to His Word.

And this is the message of Easter. His resurrection gives the final promise to overcome all the struggles and trials in this life. Jesus says in John 14, "Because I live, you also will live." He says in John 11, "He who believes in me will live, even though He dies and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die." Friends, this means that Jesus' rise from the dead means we too will rise from the dead. His victory over death is ours too.

This means that even though life is difficult for the Christian in this world, even though it is no bowl of cherries to be persecuted and mocked for our faith and even though it's no walk in the park to resist temptation and to drown the old Adam and to fight the good fight each day, we know that Christ is faithful to His promises and He has won the ultimate victory. He has overcome sickness, sin, death, and the devil by His resurrection and His resurrection to life essentially is the death blow to the grave. It is the victory that ensures us final victory on the Last Day when the dead will be raised and those of us in Christ will rise to eternal life in glory. As Jesus said to His disciples He says to you, "I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace. In this world, you will have trouble, but take heart! I have overcome the world" (Jn. 16:33)

Friends, the Gospel account of St. Mark is the shortest of the Gospel books. The earliest manuscripts had the Gospel end at verse 8 of today's text. The verses that come after verse eight in our Bibles we certainly believe to be inspired by the Holy Spirit though not likely the work of St. Mark as part of his original book. It says, 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 ending seems like a bit of a cliff-hanger. And it seems that this is the intention of St. Mark. Anyone who reads this Gospel account of Jesus Christ, the Son of God is essentially in the same situation as

the women. Will the women tell the disciples and will the disciples trust in the promise just as He said? The other Gospels explain what happened. Mark leaves it as a cliff-hanger. Friends, by the fact that the Gospel of Mark was written down along with the other Gospels shows us the end of the story. It shows the women fulfilled what they were supposed to do and the disciples eventually believed the promise.

Now there is a question for you today. Do you trust in the promise? Having come to the end of this Gospel, having heard the story of the Son of God, God in the flesh who came to lay down His life and take it up again, do you place your trust in this Son of God? Even though following Jesus brings with it suffering and sacrifice in this world and a struggle to overcome temptation and to fight the good fight of the faith, do you nonetheless trust in Him?

This, of course, is the good news of Easter. Jesus has accomplished what He said He would do by rising from the dead. And the good news is that it not only happened to Jesus but it will happen to us too. "He who lives and believes in Me will live" says Jesus. Through Him we too will be renewed, restored, resurrected on the Last Day when He comes again just as He said He will. And we too live in hope in spite of all the difficult circumstances and situations that may come our way. We know that Jesus is faithful to His promises and we can be confident in that.

No matter what life throws at us Jesus will keep His Word. That is the Good News of Easter. And so we celebrate life today. We celebrate what has happened in Jesus' victory over death and we also look forward to what will happen on the Last Day when we will see the victory with Him in all its fullness.

Today we celebrate this hope; it is not a wishful thinking. It is sure and secure, it is built on the rock of Christ. And His Word is true. And so through all the changes and chances of life we can be confident in the One who has risen to life, who has overcome all things. He is our very life. The stone is removed; the tomb is empty; and in Christ and only in Christ the gate to heaven is open. Thanks be to God. Amen. The peace of God that surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.