

Easter Sunday 31 March 2024  
Matthew 28:1-10  
St Peter's Lutheran Church, Elizabeth  
Greg Bensted

Grace and peace to you from God: Father, Risen Christ, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

*Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.'* Let's pray: ...

**CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN, INDEED!**

On no other day do we hear the words, CHRIST IS RISEN! and respond with such joy and gusto, HE IS RISEN, INDEED! This day fills us with hope and joy and brings peace to our embattled souls. There's nothing to see here. Don't be afraid. All is well. Go and see Jesus.

Whenever I hear different combinations of these words, I'm reminded of two men whom have had a powerful impact on my life. Not so much the words they spoke, though they were true, but the integrity, certitude, and calm with which they were delivered. Both my father and my father-in-law, reiterated the same sentiments when staring down the barrel of our darkest enemy; death. They both said pretty much the same thing: "I'm not worried. I know I'm going to be with Jesus."

That's the Easter message. There's nothing to see here! Don't be afraid. Jesus is alive and all is well!

This message that cries out to us from an empty tomb, is the antidote to the human story of lives lived in fear of darkness and death. It's a story each of us knows well. We fear for ourselves and we fear for those we love. Yet, something is there in the tombs of our lives. Something more powerful than ourselves. Something life giving and life affirming.

Two women, both named Mary, go to see the tomb. They know something is there. They saw it all unfold. They watched the crucifixion. They saw Jesus die. They saw Joseph take Jesus' body, wrap it in a clean linen cloth, and put it in the tomb. They saw him roll a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb. They were there, sitting opposite the tomb. Now, after the sabbath, as the first day of the week dawns, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary go to the tomb of Jesus, knowing what to expect: death, fear, pain, loss, sorrow, and a tortured body beginning to decay. They know what to expect.

However, this new sunrise and the calamity of a great earthquake signal the dawn of a new creation; one in which death no longer rules. God, not death, will have the first, the last, and every word in between.

“Do not be afraid,” the angel proclaims. “He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said.” The empty tomb proclaims that all is well and issues the invitation, “Go quickly,” the angel tells them, “Go and see Jesus. He lives!”  
**CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN, INDEED!**

This is the Church's story. It's the same old story told every year. Some of you have heard this story only a few times. Most of you 60, 70, 80, 90-odd times. The story never changes. The beauty is, it changes us. Each year we gather to hear this story for only one reason: so that we can leave; so that we can leave the darkness and tombs of our lives and live. We want to be reminded, “There is nothing here. Do not be afraid. All is well. Jesus lives.”

Too often we think of resurrection as something that happens to us after we die. We tend to limit resurrection to nothing more than a promise of life after death. And yet, the power and gift of resurrection aren't so much in what happens after death but right here, now, today. Perhaps we should worry less about whether there is life after death and more about whether there is life before death.

The joy of Easter isn't only that God has raised Christ from the dead. Easter joy is also about the possibility and the promise that, regardless of what our lives are like now, new life is available to each one of us here and now. God has raised Christ from the dead and we are now free to claim his life as our own.

What matters most about Easter is not only the empty tomb but what we do tomorrow, the day after, and the day after that. How will we now live differently? Jesus didn't die and rise again so that we might continue life as ho-hum. If this new life and freedom don't change us, we may as well roll the stone back over the tomb. If we leave here today and don't think about Easter again until next year, then we've entirely missed the gift. Our lives are either the evidence of resurrection, or they're not.

We're no longer slaves, as we sing; no longer prisoners to the power or fear of sin, darkness, and death. We don't have to be worried about how all of this is going to turn out. Life is eternal. Love is immortal. We're free to live. We're free to love. The end of the resurrection story is the beginning of our life. Christ is risen! ... Live fully alive now. Why wait until after death? Darkness has become light. Sin has been forgiven. The tomb has become the womb of new creation. There is no more death. Life and love are everywhere.

Go quickly. There's nothing to see here. Don't be afraid. Christ is risen! ... Go and see Jesus! Happy Easter everyone. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surprises us no end on this day, will keep your hearts and your minds alive in Christ Jesus. Amen.