

Easter Day

Last Friday evening, we gathered to hear the events of Jesus' death.
He died at about 3:00PM on Friday and was laid in the tomb before sundown.
This was the first day of His entombment.
At sundown, the Jewish Sabbath began and he laid in the tomb also on this, the 2nd day.
At sundown on Sabbath, the First Day of the Week (Sunday) began.
And so we began the Easter Vigil at sundown last evening.
This marked the third day in the tomb and the fulfillment of the OT Scriptures.
Then, sometime during the hours of darkness, Jesus came back to life.
He then descended into hell to proclaim his victory there as we confess in the Creed.
But even though Jesus was alive and out of the tomb already during the hours of pre-dawn darkness, it did His disciples no good yet.
What was still lacking is the revelation and preaching of His resurrection.
This why we return here, to the tomb this morning.
Here we see a messenger with a white robe who proclaims the resurrection.
"Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here." And how did the women react to this?
"They went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."
These are not the actions of faith but of unbelief!
The certainty of God is overcome by the fears and appearances of the moment.
And this fear leads to disobedience — As also happens in your life.
No matter how silly these fears may appear in hindsight, the disobedience that they bring on is not silly or imaginary.
Your life also is filled with fears and troubles that, when you look back on them, were completely unfounded and silly. Even so, they drive they way you think and act.
The fact that such fears caused you to sin at the time and the damage that such sin has done remains very real.
It is unbelief that causes you so easily to pass by the stories of martyrs who willingly suffered torturous deaths while you yourself are reluctant to suffer insult without insulting back like the unbelievers do.
It is unbelief that causes you to worry about your livelihood, your health and your future—as though Christ could conquer death but not money-matters.
It is unbelief that causes you to work harder at preserving yourself than you do at protecting others and to neglect the love of those around you because you are too busy nursing your own fears and needs.
It is unbelief which causes you to worry about the loss of personal property or the loss of friendship or the family discomfort that a faithful witness to Christ might bring.
Sure, you may look back on it in time and laugh at how silly and superstitious you were—but the damage is already done—it is no laughing matter.
For by such actions and attitudes you deny the reality of the Lord's resurrection.
Jesus' bodily resurrection means that He cares about your body and physical life.
It means that death has no power over those who are in Him by faith.
And, by "death," I mean to include absolutely everything that contributes to death: Sickness, poverty, loneliness, famine, flood, war, strife... all of it!
The resurrection of Christ in His body means that none of these hold any threat!

All must now serve to give eternal life and though they may hurt, they no longer harm.
When we fall back into the fear of these things, we deny the resurrection.
God's will is thwarted, God's name is besmirched and God's kingdom is resisted.
This is more than a problem of weak resolve—it is falling back into death and hell.
No matter how much a dead man might want to be alive, he cannot make it happen.
Likewise for you, if you are to be raised to a new life of faith, hope and love from the deadness of unbelief and sin, God Himself must do it to you.
This He promises to do through hearing of His preaching.
The young man in a white robe was there not to let Jesus out — as though the stone would be a barrier for him — but rather, in order to preach the resurrection.
For the emptiness of the tomb in itself is not conclusive evidence of the resurrection!
In fact, Mary Magdalene's first conclusion was that someone had stolen the body.
You might think that it would have been a more dramatic announcement of the resurrection had Jesus been there for them to see.
Wouldn't it be much more glorious for these women to find Jesus still sitting in the tomb—alive and well and talking to them?
Surely then, they would have believed more readily.
But no! Instead, an angel—a messenger—tells the women that He is raised.
Why? Why is Christ's resurrection announced but He is not seen yet?
Faith, for one reason. faith is the substance of things UNSEEN.
Even in the resurrection of our Lord, faith is required before sight, in order that the sight might be the blessed sight of faith.
No one ever believes in Christ BECAUSE of the resurrection—no one!
We are given to believe IN the resurrection of the dead — not BECAUSE of it.
In fact, John also tells us that when Jesus did appear to Mary she mistook Him for an ordinary gardener and couldn't even recognize her friend of 3 years.
Abraham was clear and firm: *"If they do not believe Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe if someone should rise from the dead."*
Sight will not do because sight is still under the power of death.
But sound, preaching, that is the way that God has always called life out of death.
God said, "Let there be light" and there was light.
On the first day of the week, God's Word created what was not there.
And God's Word is now with the messenger in white.
Creating, enlightening, vivifying and raising to new life.
So even though the Resurrection is the most glorious event in all history, it cannot produce faith.—Only the Word produces faith.
We do not congregate here today simply to commemorate the resurrection.
Nor merely out of the sense of thrill and excitement that the Easter story generates.
If that were all, we could just as well sit at home and watch an Easter special.
But no! We are here today for the one thing needful, namely to hear the Word of God.
For it is in this way that God Himself works in you today to believe in the resurrection from the dead and the life everlasting.
So also today, you do not see the resurrected Christ with your physical eyes, but you hear Him. You hear the preaching of a young man in a white robe.
And in HEARING with your physical ears, you see Christ by the eyes of faith.
And this Christ gives you life and resurrection from the dead.
He takes away all the power of death and leaves you with nothing to fear.
Sickness, poverty, loneliness, famine, flood, war, strife... all has been neutralized.

More than that! All has been co-opted to be instruments of life!
We still see such evils surrounding us but they have now been taken into the hands of
the One who is raised from death.
And now they can do us no harm but only help us.
For in His hands, they can hurt but they cannot harm.
They have bite but they have no sting.
They can threaten and rage and bluster but they cannot do anything against Jesus.
And this Jesus comes to dwell in you by faith through the hearing of His Word.
This is the way God has always worked.
From the first day of creation, when, by His Word God called light out of
darkness—God creates by the Word of His mouth.
So it is not insignificant that this announcement from God takes place on Sunday, the
First Day of the week at the dawning of the Sun.
Here, Mark uses of the language of creation to tell you that Sunday is always the day
for the light to dawn and the new creation to begin.
This was true at the beginning of the world and it was true on the first Easter—it is also
true for you today.
You who hear the Word of God this morning are created anew in Christ Jesus.
The true Light from on high here shines into your heart to cast away fear and
unbelief—to drive away the shadows and fearful specters of the devil.
Pay careful heed to the Word spoken here that points you to the place where the risen
Christ has promised to meet you.
These are the same life-giving Word of God that caused light to shine out of darkness.
And Where does this preaching point you? Where has Christ promised to be?
He is the baptizer at the font and the server at the table.
Here the resurrected and living Lord has promised to meet you to give and sustain the
new life of His beloved.
Here Christ Himself, who passed through the fear of death and hell, comes to remove
your fears and replace them with a faith that clings only to His Word — a hope
that sees past the troubles of the day to the new day that has come — and love that
serves others willingly and without fear.
Make no mistake, Christ is arisen indeed!
The One who was killed by God’s righteous wrath is alive again.
Christ has burst the gates of death and hell.
The Seed that was planted in the ground has sprung forth into a righteous Branch.
The tree of the cross has been turned into the Tree of life.
The gate to paradise is no longer blocked—no angel guards the way.
No longer is the fruit of the tree forbidden.
Now the fruit of that second tree has ripened and awaits you.
You have returned to paradise—Christ has opened the way again.
Today, the angelic announcement cancels the prohibition from Eden.
For today this Tree stands in the garden and says, “*Take, eat. Take; drink.*”
This is the glory of Jesus’ resurrection which is brought to you today.
Be not afraid. He is risen! He is risen indeed. AMEN.