

# EASTER SUNDAY 2009

## Cross of Glory Evangelical Lutheran Church

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### He Is Not Here!

#### Mark 16:1-8

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body.<sup>2</sup> Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb<sup>3</sup> and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"<sup>4</sup> But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away.<sup>5</sup> As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.<sup>6</sup> "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.<sup>7</sup> But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"<sup>8</sup> Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

Don't you just love Easter? What is better than getting up early on Easter morning, coming to church, hearing the Easter Gospel, singing the great hymns of Easter and rejoicing in the resurrection of our Savior? Not only is the service great, Easter is a great day for fellowship with family and friends. Most of you probably have family traditions that make for a special day. And, of course, you can't forget the congregation's wonderful Easter breakfast. This is certainly a day we all anticipate and enjoy when it arrives. It wasn't always that way. The women we meet in our Gospel today got up early on that first Easter morning. But they weren't looking forward to the day's events. The day was hardly one of joy and celebration for them. Why? It was because they thought that Jesus was still in the tomb. They thought their beloved Teacher was dead. And if that were true—if they had found Jesus still in that tomb—Easter would not be a happy day for us either. Thank God that is not how the story unfolds. The fact is, Jesus was not and is not in a tomb. This truth is why we smile this morning.

It had been a horrible few days for those women. Three days earlier they stood by as their beloved Lord, Jesus, was handed over to be beaten and crucified. You can imagine the tremendous amount of pain they suffered as they watched Jesus be humiliated in this way. And that pain turned to grief when they saw him die. What would they do now? Where would they turn? Those thoughts were probably going through their heads as they walked towards the tomb to carry out the solemn task of preparing the body for its burial. It is obvious from the way they took the time to prepare the spices and bring them to the tomb that they fully expected Jesus to be in that tomb. There wasn't even the least thought that perhaps that tomb would be empty.

Imagine the shock those women experienced when that is exactly what they found—an empty tomb. They didn't have long to ponder what had happened to Jesus' body. Soon an angel appeared to them. He was not a mourner dressed in a customary suit of solemn black. He was dressed in gleaming white. The angel said to the women, "*Don't be alarmed, "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where*

*they laid him.*” The the angel reminded the women what Jesus had told them: he was going to be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and, on the third day, rise again. This is exactly what had happened. There was a bit of a rebuke in the angel’s words. If only the women had taken Jesus’ words to heart, they would have known that a tomb was the last place they would find Jesus on that morning.

Those women were not the only ones who would make the mistake of looking for the living Jesus among the dead. In fact, people are still making that very mistake even today. I am sure you heard something about the documentary that aired a couple of years ago concerning the tomb of Jesus. One of the claims made in that documentary was that they found the box which held the bones of Jesus. As soon as I heard that, I knew that this “discovery” was not for real. How could I be so sure? These scientists were looking for the living among the dead. They were acting like fools. They will never find a box containing Jesus’ bones. There is no such thing. Jesus is alive!

As foolish as it is to think that Jesus is still in the tomb, we do the same thing sometimes, don’t we? Sometimes, we treat Jesus as though Easter never happened and his body is still in the grave. We do this when we neglect the help that he offers us. Have you ever found yourself in a stressful situation and suddenly it seems as though you forget all the wonderful promises Jesus has made to you in his Word? You find yourself worrying or afraid and you fail to go to your living Savior. You try to handle your problems all by yourself. Then you despair when things don’t turn our right. How foolish! Yet that is exactly how we act. We need to hear the same rebuke from the angel when we treat Jesus like this—like he doesn’t even exist.

The truth is—Jesus does exist. He is very much alive. Though the women had forgotten Jesus’ words for a time, the angel caused them to remember. That day of sadness turned into a day of joy for those women. What a privilege for them to be the first witnesses of the empty tomb. It was a privilege they appreciated. They appreciated the empty tomb by going and telling others about it. Like the shepherds on Christmas evening, the women could not keep silent about all that they had seen and heard. They went first to the apostles. These were the men Jesus had spent three years instructing and training to be his disciples. Even with that instruction, they, too, did not at first believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. They called it “nonsense.” We know the rest of the story. They didn’t consider it nonsense when the living Jesus appeared in their midst, proving that he was alive. They, too, would take the journey from fear and sorrow to rejoicing on that first Easter.

We have the great benefit of 2000 years of hindsight. We know that we do not have to gather in fear today like those first disciples’ did. We know the whole story. And we know just how important is that the tomb was empty on Easter morning. This truth means everything to us, Jesus’ followers. If Jesus had not risen, if Jesus were still in the grave, then we would have no hope. We would have no reason to sing today. All we could do is cry on each other’s shoulders. But Jesus’ resurrection turns our sorrow to gladness. As we watched him die on Good Friday, we saw the full punishment our sins deserved. As we look into the empty tomb, we see that Jesus paid that price in full and that his payment was accepted by his Father in heaven. There was no reason for him to still be in the tomb. His mission of salvation was complete. His resurrection is the exclamation point that assures us that Jesus is just who he said he was—the Son of God, the world’s Redeemer.

Have you stopped to think today what it means to have a living Savior? This truth has eternal consequences for you and me. Jesus said, *“Because I live, you also will live.”* He was not talking about living in the sense of drawing breath and having a heartbeat. He was talking about eternal life. Because Jesus rose and lives into eternity, we know that we also have eternal life. Jesus’ resurrection means that we do not have to fear death. Death for the Christian is only a sleep. As Jesus did not remain in the tomb long, our time in the grave will be limited as well. There is a day coming when all those who died in Christ will rise from the dead just as Jesus rose on Easter morning. This truth gives us hope. It also gives us comfort to know that our loved ones who are no longer with us, who died in the Lord, are not lost forever. They, too, shall rise and join in the great reunion of the Last Day.

The fact that we have a living Savior not only has eternal consequences for each and every one of us, it has immediate consequences for us as well—right here, right now. Knowing that our Savior is not in the tomb, but is alive, means that we have a Savior who is there to hear us and help us. When we face the problems and the trials of living in a sin-filled world, we can know that we are not alone. We have one who will always be there for us—one who has the power and the desire to help us. I don’t know how people can get up and face the day to day struggles of life without the Savior by the side. I won’t ever have to know because Jesus has promised, *“Surely, I am with you always to the very end of the age.”*

Yes, Easter is truly a great day. It’s not because of the colored eggs and the Easter ham. It’s because it is a day of triumph for our Savior. It is day when we can stand before Jesus’ tomb, look inside and rejoice that he’s not there. He is alive. May we be filled with the joy of Easter today and the comfort and assurance that Easter provides every day as we rely on our living Savior. **Amen.**

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