**The Resurrection of Our Lord (Easter Sunday)**

**“No Need to Be Afraid on Easter!”
(Mark 16:1-8)
April 12, 2020**

Alleluia! Christ is risen! **He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!**

They were **afraid on Easter.** That’s how the Gospel Lesson ends. Listen again:

And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

**Afraid on Easter.** Every year that I read this reaction of the women it seems so unsuitable for this glorious day. Our context is usually so different than theirs was: the Easter lilies, the white vestments and paraments, the Alleluias without end, the crowded sanctuary… but not this year. Yes, the lilies are still here (thank you ladies for setting them up). The white vestments and paraments still don the pastor and altar. We are still singing our Alleluias here. But there is no crowded church here. Instead I stare at a smart phone on a tripod while those listening are lounging in the living room or sitting in the kitchen staring at a screen.

**Afraid on Easter.** This year the women’s reaction seems to fit the bill. And we all know why so many people are afraid today. It all centers around COVID-19. Some are afraid of the virus itself and what it could do to their health or their loved ones’. Others are afraid of the consequences of how the government has handled this COVID crisis: the effect on the economy and education, the loss of liberty and livelihood. And still others are afraid at how many might get neglected through this pandemic, how many might get depressed or suicidal, how many are lonely or stir-crazy, or how typical this kind of thing might become in the future.

**Afraid on Easter.** The women who came to the tomb were afraid for other reasons. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome had all stood at a distance on Good Friday as they witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus, then His burial. Three days later they got up with the sun and walked to Jesus’ tomb to anoint His body. As they walked, they asked who would roll away the huge stone from the entrance of the tomb. But when they arrived it was already rolled back. Entering the tomb, they saw a young man, an angel, “sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe,” and,” we are told, “they were alarmed.” And though the angel assured them that they did not need to be alarmed, the women fled anyway, seized with trembling and astonishment, saying nothing to anyone because “they were afraid.”

**Afraid on Easter.** Afraid because they saw the angel? For sure. Afraid because they did not know where the body of Jesus, which they saw placed into the tomb, had gone? Definitely. Afraid because they did not know what all of this meant? Absolutely. *But* ***why*** *did they not know?* The angel had told them what had happened, hadn’t he? He had told them that they did not need to be alarmed, but just to go with the disciples to see Jesus in Galilee. So why were they afraid? For the same reason so many are deathly afraid of COVID-19 or any other frightening thing in this world. They did not believe the word of God’s messenger. So, they did not take to heart what the resurrection of the Crucified One, Jesus Christ, really means.

**Afraid on Easter?** Only if you, like the women fleeing the tomb, flee from the word of God’s messengers who proclaim to you the resurrection joy today. The word which tells you that the Crucified One, Jesus of Nazareth, who atoned for all your sin, is now alive again in His glorified body, nevermore to die. The word which tells you that His tomb is empty and He has gone to Galilee where He commissioned His disciples to proclaim the Gospel to the nations and baptize in His name. The word which tells you that your sin, the sting of death, is forgiven by the blood He shed for you. The word which tells you that the law, the power of sin that accuses you in your hearts, God’s incarnate Son has fulfilled for you in full by His substitutionary death on the cross. The word which tells you—thanks be to God!—that death is swallowed up in victory through our Lord Jesus Christ, so that you and I and all who believe and are baptized have the hope of resurrected life with Him and one another in a Paradise that will never end!

**So, you need not be afraid on Easter!** Now, please understand me here. I am not telling you to forgo all precautions. I am not telling you to be cavalier about this virus, to stop washing your hands or to start coughing in each other’s faces. *Do* be cautious about this. Take precautions that you believe, based on the facts available, are most sensible for you to take. But for the sake of your sanity and, more importantly, for *God’s* sake and the sake of your faith in Him and His Son, do not let this virus turn you into trembling messes that hear, think, and live nothing but what COVID-19 is doing—or going to do—to your lives. No, and especially do not let this coronavirus do it to you on this day that the Lord has made!

**You need not be afraid on Easter!** You are baptized Christians! Again, please understand me here. I am not saying that we Christians are never afraid. We are. Because our hearts remain sinful even as we trust in Christ. So, we end up fearing all sorts of things instead of God. Even if it is not the virus, we fear loss of money or loss of freedom or loss of something. As Christians, we are at the same time sinful and declared righteous in Christ, so we still struggle against such fears. The Spirit wrestles against the sinful flesh throughout our lives. And *this* means we actually *must* continue to fear God or else we will stop believing in our need for Jesus and His forgiving word. So, please do not think I am saying that those who are afraid cease to be Christians. And please do not think I am saying that those who are uninterested in God’s Word have no need to fear God’s wrath against their sin. No, I am not saying anything of the sort.

What I *am* saying is that you need to think about who in particular would just love for you to be **afraid on Easter.** Do you know of anyone who might delight in the Christian Church consuming her mind with nothing but fear on this glorious day? Anyone who has led man and woman to hide away in fear before? Anyone who brought death and disease into the pristine Paradise our heavenly Father created? Anyone who tempted our Lord Jesus in the wilderness? Anyone whose sniveling head was crushed on the cross when our Lord Jesus died for the sins of the world? Anyone who is going to be stuck in a prison forever when God’s Son returns on the Day of Resurrection to judge the living and the dead?

**Afraid on Easter?** That’s *the devil’s* job today, not yours. **You need not be afraid on Easter!** For you have God’s word from His messenger that tells you that this is the day that the Lord has made for you to rejoice in all your days and forever. Let the devil tremble in fear. As we sang in our opening hymn:

 Now hell, its prince, the devil,
 Of all their pow’r are shorn;
 Now I am safe from evil,
 And sin I laugh to scorn.
 Grim death with all its might
 Cannot my soul affright;
 It is a pow’rless form,
 Howe’er it rave and storm (LSB 467:4).

Yes, the devil is the one who should be afraid on Easter! For Jesus has defeated him. Death should be afraid on Easter. For Jesus took away sin, death’s sting, fulfilling God’s Law as your Substitute. Dying your death. Paying for your sin. Now the devil cannot accuse you. Now death cannot hold you. Now hell cannot have you. Christ is victorious over sin, death, and the devil for you. Yes, just as surely as Christ’s death is your death, so too is His life your life. And He lives, nevermore to die. He lives for you. He lives to silence all your fears, to wipe away your tears, to give you hope not just for tomorrow but for eternity. This terrifies the devil, so let *him* be afraid on Easter. But let not your Christian hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. Rather, rejoice and give thanks, singing with the hymnist:

[Christ] rends death’s iron chain;
He breaks through sin and pain;
He shatters hell’s grim thrall;
I follow Him through all (LSB 467:6).

**Afraid on Easter.** That’s how our Gospel Lesson ends. But that’s not how the story ends. No, those blessed women at the tomb ended up trusting in Jesus and rejoicing in the resurrection. And that’s how your story ends, too. **You need not be afraid on Easter,** dear brothers and sisters in Christ**.** For you too know that your Redeemer lives. And so, like Job, you can confess that you too will live. You can confess that at the last Jesus will stand upon the earth, and even after your skin has been thus destroyed, after COVID-19 is a thing of the past, along with any and all other fears this world throws your way, yet in your flesh you shall see God. And baptized into Christ’s death and resurrection, trusting in Him, you will not be afraid on that day either. Instead, you will say, as you do today, “This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!”

Alleluia! Christ is risen! **He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!**

The peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. **Amen.** — Rev. Stephen K. Preus —