

April 1, 2018
Easter Sunday

“He is Risen! No joke!”

Mark 16:1-8

“When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. And they were saying to one another, ‘Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?’ And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. And he said to them, ‘April fools!’”

Not. Easter only falls on April Fool’s Day only once in a great while, so I really wanted to take this opportunity to work it into today’s message. But it just doesn’t work. The resurrection isn’t an April fool. Quite the opposite in fact. It’s a promise fulfilled.

An April Fool’s joke or prank sets somebody up to expect one thing and then pulls a switcheroo at the end. The resurrection isn’t unexpected—it’s foretold! *“And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever.”* That’s Isaiah hundreds of years earlier. This salvation is proclaimed in words and actions throughout the Old Testament and of course Jesus Himself told His disciples many times that He would die and then rise three days later. The resurrection isn’t “April Fools.” It’s Christ’s “I told you so!”

If my life depended on dragging Easter and April Fool’s Day together, I’d have to really aim it toward unbelievers. Scores of ancient prophecies point to and come to fruition in this Christ. Fanatical followers proclaim His resurrection even though they gain nothing but ostracization, persecution and even death for doing so. Millions believe, gain joy and peace believing in this guy as Savior even in the face of continued persecution. You are going to die, but refuse to even consider the historical Jesus attested risen from the dead? Seriously, I point to the empty tomb and say, “Who is the fool now?”

People deny this wonderful truth for a lot of reasons, but I think it usually boils down to a basic core—it’s not reasonable. Folks inflate themselves and demand God make sense to them. And God working salvation through centuries in this rebellious people Israel by bringing for His own Son from some peasant virgin and then having Him nailed to a cross and then wake up—nobody would do that! Certainly not God! It’s foolishness!

Almighty God must make perfect sense to us???!?! Excuse me. You are aware that certain members of our race willingly eat Tide Pods on a dare? Simply look around at the wonder of creation—every step of knowledge we take only creates more questions and more wonder! What makes sense is a God beyond and above us who does wonderful stuff for us. And what we read revealed in Holy Scripture is this God making promises and keeping them in ways more wonderful than we ever would conceive.

God creates humanity and it turns on Him like a rabid dog. Our solution? Put the dog down. God’s solution? Let humanity continue with a promise to redeem humanity from it’s fall.

Fine. God’s going to redeem humanity. Our solution? Make humanity work off the debt, behave, and those who work really hard might make the cut. God’s solution? Fulfill the promise Himself by sending His Son to assume the debt on the cross and bring it to the grave not just for some, but for the entire human race.

Fine. We're saved. What's that look like? If we had our way, we'd continue the way we are, enjoying broken life in a fallen world until we die. God's way: Make us perfect and live forever without any sin, pain, sorrow or death.

Fine: How do we receive this gift? Our way? Work really hard, maybe do some elaborate good works and rigorous self-improvement regimen while being sure to strictly keep God's Law. God's way. Grab some water and baptize. Grab some bread and wine and have a meal. Speak words of forgiveness.

The empty tomb is not an April Fool! It is the guarantee that all of God's promises are fulfilled in Christ. This devil thing, this sin thing, this death thing—it all stands defeated for us in this resurrection thing! The empty tomb is the proof that this weird and wonderful plan of Almighty all-loving God has come to pass and is effective for what He promised *“He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth.”*

The fool? The fool is one who sees the empty cross and empty tomb and knows He is dying in his sins but says, “No thanks. I think I'll hold onto the sin and pass on the Savior” somehow thinking everything will work out. Jesus who died and rose has not been unclear. He says, “Repent, and believe the good news.” He says, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved. Whoever does not believe is condemned.”

There is no April Fool with salvation. It is just as God planned and just as God promises. You don't get to impose your preferred understanding on it; tweak the way it works to fit your lifestyle. This empty tomb guarantees your empty tomb. As you are Christ's, Christ's forever resurrected life is yours. And the terms are simple: believe and receive.

There. The Gospel has been proclaimed. God's promise fulfilled is yours. He is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia! Salvation is yours.

God is bound by His promise of grace in Christ. He has called you to life. You are the only one who can pull a switcheroo here. You can say, “April fool!”, turn and walk away from the cross and empty tomb, away from your baptism into Christ and back to this fallen life of sin and brokenness as your greatest good and treasure.

Or you can see the truth, that the Resurrection is no joke, far from it. It is your victory in Christ over not only death, but the very brokenness of creation, over the fallen nature within yourself that desperately needs the healing Christ has gained for you forever.

The Psalm saith: The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” The wise one knows not only that there is a God, but that He died and rose give us resurrection to eternal life. The saved says, “He is Risen! He is risen indeed, alleluia!” No joke.

Amen.