

March 31, 2024
Easter Sunday

“He Gone!”

Mark 16:1-8

“He is not here.”

Never have these words been more wonderful than that Sunday morning outside of Jerusalem. The angel sitting in the tomb says, “*You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here.*” It is the greatest of news, yet the women don’t seem to react as if something wonderful has taken place: “*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.*”

These women totally freak out, and I can’t say I blame them. They’ve been put through the ringer the last few days. Everybody was on edge before they even arrived at the city, wondering what might happen. Then the rabbi they love and in whom they have placed their trust was arrested, quickly tried, condemned and horribly crucified right before their eyes. They are sleep-deprived, having mourned for Him throughout the prior couple of nights. They show up to the tomb early, perhaps hoping to get some closure by serving Him one last time in embalming His corpse, and some dazzling happy-faced guy is sitting in the tomb saying, “He gone!”

Of course they freak out. They can’t process what has happened. The way they knew things were has been totally blown apart. And you know what, I think this is kind of the proper reaction! And we should kind of react this way also to the wonderful news of Christ’s resurrection.

We know how things are according to the world, right? We have some funny sayings that reflect this. “The only two things that are sure in life are death and taxes.” “Whoever dies with the most toys, wins.” Even the book of Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament talks about how you’re born, you grow up, you work for years and then you die—calling this life “vanity” or the translation I prefer, “meaninglessness”. According to basic human reasoning, that’s just how life is.

“He has risen. He is not here” blows that understanding up. It is not just that Jesus is no longer in the grave—death is no longer in the grave—not for us! Death and the grave is an absolute to earthly understanding. There is no alternative. Yet, for those in Christ, because He is not here, our grave is absent death...despite death! Christ’s empty tomb where death lies destroyed robs our grave of death’s power! “He gone!”

Jesus has cleared all of our obstacles. His perfect life has been given to us so our unrighteousness is wrapped up and covered by His righteousness. His atoning death on the cross has paid our debt of sin and continual forgiveness for those who repent and believe is our reality. And finally, “He has risen. He is not here.” Like St. Paul says, “*The final enemy to be destroyed is death.*” The empty tomb means Jesus has been there, done that.

By this the entire order of life as the world knows it stands shattered, so yes, a little freaking out about this is entirely appropriate. Like happened with the women and the disciples, we struggle with what this means...but finally come to the blessed Gospel realization: He is Risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! That said, it doesn’t mean we should ever stop freaking out about this.

The world, and our life in it, tries to do this, to dull our wonder and amazement at the resurrection. Jesus spoke of this in a parable, about how the cares of life, the deceitfulness of

riches, the opposition to the Word all can work to destroy the Gospel seed of hope, the joyful believer's excitement in victory over death in Christ Jesus.

How does this take place? Just life. Day after day after day life happens. The joy, the sorrows, the responsibilities, the daily grind. It all churns on and we do our best to manage it, to find happiness in it, to...take charge of it. And to do that we need to know how things are. And that's where we make our mistake. We start shoehorning life into what makes reasonable sense according to us. And if that's how things are, well, there is no reason to freak out. We've got things handled.

All the while Satan is hanging out in the shadows, encouraging such thinking. He likes it when your life is all about this life. He loves it because if everything is all about this life... "and then you die" is the reasonable conclusion. That's how things are. That's what makes sense to us. We may not be happy with impending death, but we just kind of accept that's how it is.

Ironically, what the world and Satan and your own sinful flesh all try to accomplish in your life is to make you think of Jesus, "He is not here," because this broken world is life, and you're the one in charge.

That's the lie that is made plain by the angel's words! The angel sits in the tomb, the place where death tried to make an end of the Savior—and death failed! Death was overcome. When the angel says "*He has risen; he is not here,*" it means Jesus is now alive and reigning over everything everywhere for all time! It means you know nothing of what is reasonable, of how things really are—death is absolutely not "just how it is"! This Gospel truth He has revealed to you by the Holy Spirit through the Word is news that blows your mind, makes you freak out because things are absolutely not like the world and your earthly mind said they were.

This life you live that you're tempted to think you control? It belongs to Jesus. You're in control of nothing! All this stuff we get so caught up in, all this stuff human thinking tries to convince us life is all about? It's all going to end and the "and then you die" part is a lie. What endures is you in Christ! And yes, this should continually cause us to kind of freak out in the best of ways!

Why? Because "He is not here" is now exclusively a statement of His tomb. When it comes to you, He is here because He has risen! In every situation the living Christ is with you, seeing you through this life, this veil of tears, to the very same resurrection to which He rose. He is here right now in the Gospel Word I proclaim to you in this message. It was His Word and promise spoken through me in the absolution of your sins. It's His name standing upon you in every invocation of the Holy Trinity recalling your Holy Baptism. It's His true resurrected body and blood served by Him to you in the Sacrament of the Altar for the forgiveness of sins. It is Christ the crucified and risen with you whenever two or three gathered in His name to share His wonderful promises with one another. It is Him, true God and true man, listening attentively to your prayer whenever you approach Him in faith.

Go ahead and freak out because the Almighty God who created all things does not stand far off while you live here, grabbing what you can of a short life of struggle, and then you die. No! The Creator of all things deeply and enduringly love you, His created creature, so much that He sent His Son into your flesh to redeem you from death. He has risen so, despite how life looks to be—you do not die!

Don't let this world's life get dull and down because you know how things are. Jesus has forever redefined your reality. Death—He gone! Your life is in Christ and He is Risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Amen.

