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The Resurrection of our Lord

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Vienna, VA

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“God Came Back!”

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:19-28; Mark 16:1-8

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Those silly women. They obviously weren't thinking very clearly. ***“Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body.”*** But it suddenly dawned on them . . . after their arms started to get tired from carrying all those spices, and after they were already halfway to the tomb . . . *“Hey, Mary! By the way, whose gonna let us in? Whose gonna roll away the stone and let us in?”* . . . But that's what death does to us, doesn't it. We don't think straight.

Then after they got to the tomb, heard the message of the angel, and saw that there was no body to anoint, what did they do? ***“Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.”*** . . . Well that's not very “Easter-y!” They're supposed to be happy, not bewildered and afraid! . . . But that's what death does to us, doesn't it? That's why we don't like going to funeral homes – we don't know what to say. We don't know how to act.

And what about that message of the angel to the women? ***“You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here.”*** You know what? That was bad news to them! The women had gone there looking for a dead Jesus, and He was not there. The women had gone to the graveyard, to the tomb, looking for death, and when death was not there, they were *disappointed*.

Those silly women . . . they did exactly what you and I would have done! You see, they had already accepted death. Of course, they couldn't think straight. Of course, they were confused. Of course, they didn't know what to do or say. Neither do we! . . .

But they were there! They were there when Jesus was hanging on that cross. The other disciples – the big male disciples – they ran away! But they women were there, and they could tell you, *“He's dead! We saw it with our own two eyes. We followed them to the cemetery.”* . . . And that was that. They accepted it. Made plans to go on with their lives. . . . Sounds just like you and me, doesn't it?

You want to know how confused we are about death? Let me tell you. Our world today tells us that we're supposed to accept death. I'm sure you've heard many people say that "*death is just a part of life.*" Many people now see death as an escape, as a "friend." And some doctors have signed onto that theory as well, willing now to help you kill yourself. . . . But if all of that's true, then why are some of the largest and most expensive buildings in every town across America, and probably across this world, hospitals? If all of that is true, then why is one of the single largest expenditures in our government and in almost every employer, health care? If death is our "friend," simply "a part of life," and something to be accepted, then why do we spend so much time and money fighting against it? . . . You see, we're just as confused as those women at the tomb!

But there was no confusion for God. And so while Satan has managed to pull one over on us, and get us to accept abortion, and mercy killing, and "death as a part of life," and gang members and terrorists who see dying as a badge of honor – God wasn't confused! Not in the least! And so in our reading from First Corinthians, what does God call death? "***The enemy.***" Not a friend, but a foe! Not something to be accepted, but something to be defeated! Something to be put under His foot, and squashed like a bug!

And so God did! And that's what we are celebrating today. . . . That Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! . . . "*Jesus Christ is risen today!*" . . . "*I know that my Redeemer lives!*" . . . Death is defeated, and our future is a future of life, and hope, and peace, and joy! . . . But you know what? We gotta stop only singing about that, and start doing it! We gotta stop trying to get so used to death and start getting used to life! Because that's what you and I will be doing for eternity – living! "***For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive!***"

Because that's what we really need, isn't it? We want to live. In fact, as we thought about during our midweek Lenten services, we're "Dying to Live." . . . Maybe you remember when you were in elementary school learning about the explorers – those men who traveled about the world on foot, and who sailed around the world, looking for new lands and countries. We all remember Christopher Columbus, Marco Polo, and there were a bunch of others. But there was one who stands out in my mind, and his name was Ponce De Leon. Do you remember him? Do you remember what he went looking for? . . . The fountain of youth. Somewhere, he believed, in this world, was a body of water, a fountain of water, which could make a person perpetually young, so you would never grow old, and never die, but live forever. But he never found it. . . . But today, you and I know what Ponce De Leon didn't know. Not that it doesn't exist, but that he didn't have to travel around the world looking for the fountain of youth – because it's

right here! In our church and every church. ***“For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive”*** – and it is in the waters of Holy Baptism where we are given life! For there we get death over with, and Christ gives us His life. There, Christ makes His resurrection our resurrection, and promises that those who rise to new life with Him will not die again, but live forever. . . . And so that is our fountain of youth! There is the only water in this world that can make you and I live forever! And so the message for you and I today is, **“Get used to it!”** Stop trying so hard to accept death, and start getting used to life. Both your life here, and your life eternally! Because in this world of death, God is in the **life-giving** business. Because on that first Easter morning, Jesus wasn’t in the tomb. **God came back.**

But, you know, that wasn’t the first time! God had been coming back and giving life to His people all along. *Easter shouldn’t have been the surprise that it was!* It’s the way God had been working all along. And so Adam and Eve fell into sin. ***“As in Adam all die,”*** right? But God didn’t leave ‘em dead. **God came back.**

God’s people were slaves in Egypt. Over 400 years, forced to work under the whip. But God didn’t leave ‘em there. **God came back.**

Time after time, when God’s people turned their backs on Him, He allowed them to be defeated by their enemies. Conquered and overrun. Hauled off into exile. Slavery. But God never left ‘em there. **God always came back.**

While His people were under Roman rule, **God came back.** A man named Joseph found out that the woman he was engaged to, Mary, was pregnant! But you know what he really found out? **God was coming back!**

The lepers living in colonies out in the wilderness found out. The lame, the blind, and the deaf found out. The prostitutes and sinners and outcasts found out. **God came back for them!**

And even though they didn’t get it at first, those silly women at the tomb found out. Those disciples who had run away in fear found out. And the guards who thought they were guarding the tomb found out. **God came back!**

So when are we going to learn? ***“For as in Adam all die”*** – yes! But ***“in Christ all will be made alive!”*** When are we going to stop trying to get used to death, and start getting used to life? Knowing that **God always comes back!**

So what are you facing in your life right now? What problem, what difficulty, what struggle, what fear and doubt, what confusion, what “empty tomb” are you staring into? **God came back.** . . . What enemy are you facing that is more powerful than death? What problem that is harder to overcome than death? **God came back** – He defeated death. **God came back** to give life. **God came back for you!** So why are we so confused? Why are we so afraid?

Today we are celebrating Easter not just because God came back to the grave and rose from the dead, **but because He keeps coming back!** He keeps coming back for you. To give you His life. To carry your burdens. To lead and guide you. To forgive your sins. To wipe away your tears. To hear your prayers. To listen to your cries of anguish and frustration. To comfort you when you mourn. To feed you with His very own body and blood. To protect you. To give you what you need. To be there with you when you die, so that He can take you through death and into the eternal life of Heaven. . . . **God comes back.**

But actually, you know, that statement’s not quite right – **God came back.** Because really, He never leaves us. It *seems* that He does, though . . . sometimes, doesn’t it? It *seems* that we’re sometimes left alone, left to twist in the wind, left to get ourselves out of the mess we got ourselves into. But that’s not the way it is. God may sometimes hide Himself from us, to test us, to strengthen our faith – but He never leaves us alone. And His coming back to us is really His revealing to us that He was never really gone, and that He had not forgotten us – and we realize just how little our faith really is. For instead of focusing on life, when those problems in our lives arise, we focus on them, we obsess on them, we make them into a bigger mess than they are! And we think God has left us alone. . . .

But could it be, could it be that it is exactly in that mess, that **God is coming back to us?** To work in your life and deliver you?

Could it be that in the unexpected, **God is coming back to us?** To make you realize that what may be unexpected to you is not unexpected to Him, and that the crosses or the joys in your life do not happen by chance?

Could it be that when you think you are defeated, **God is coming back to you?** To give you His victory, to fight for you, to be your strength?

That’s what the women discovered when they got to the tomb that first Easter morning. What they thought was bad news was good news! Instead of sorrow, they received joy! Instead of finding death, there was life! Because **God came back**, just as He said.

So get used to it! Get used to God coming back for you. Get used to God coming to give you life, in all that He does. For in Christ, you are alive, and will live eternally! Because today, the tomb is empty! Because today, as the angel said, ***“He is not here. He has risen!”*** Because today, God came back, and Jesus, our Saviour, is alive!

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus our Lord unto everlasting life. Amen.