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The Resurrection of our Lord

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Trembling and Astonishment Have Their Day, but Joy and Life are Yours Forever”
Text: Mark 16:1-8; Isaiah 25:6-9; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Alleluia! Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!] Alleluia!

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

Some folks don't like the Easter Gospel that we heard today. Because it doesn't end right. When those women saw the empty tomb and heard the message of the angel, they should have been happy, right? They should have been filled with joy, *like us*. They should have leaped and danced and run and told that world that *Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

But they didn't. Mark tells us: ***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.***

Some folks don't like that, but how utterly realistic. For that's what death does to us - it fills us with utter dread and fear and confusion. Imagine if you, today, went out to the cemetery, to the grave of a loved one, and you found it dug up, the casket torn open, and the body missing - what would you think? And what would you think if someone then came up behind you and told you: *Oh, yes, He is risen; he is not here.* What would you do? Very near the same thing as the women, I imagine. You would go home, a mixed-up jumble of ***trembling and astonishment***, confusion and pain.

Yet we learn from the other Gospels that the women eventually did tell the disciples and Peter, and that they came and saw the empty tomb, too. And we know as St. Paul told us, that the risen Jesus then appeared ***to Peter, and the twelve, and more than 500 brothers at one time.*** . . . And with that, slowly but surely, *the stones were being rolled away.* Not the stone that enclosed Jesus' tomb - that stone had been rolled away by the angel to show that Jesus had risen - but the stones that covered their hearts were being rolled away. The stones of unbelief, of doubt, of confusion, of fear, of uncertainty. Jesus comes to them, that they may know: *Yes, He was dead, but now is alive.* Death could not hold Him. Death is now defeated. Death is no longer the end. **The power of that horrible, horrendous, life-stealing foe has been knocked back to hell!** The great battle between life and death is done,

and life has won.

Don't blame the women for not getting that right away - we don't either. That's why we're so afraid of death. It still looks so strong and powerful. It often takes people in the prime of their lives. It sometimes brutally takes people. It will, at times, come so suddenly and unexpectedly. Death seems so wild and out of control, and it seems so final, and looking around at our world, it seems like death, not life, is winning.

And that's exactly what satan wants you to think - that he is winning. That's the *spin* he puts on Easter. Living here near Washington, you know about "spin." You know how politicians "spin" what happens so that no matter whether they were on the winning or losing side of an argument or a vote, they come out looking like they got what they wanted. That's what satan is trying to do with Easter. Yes, Jesus rose from the dead - he cannot deny that fact, though he tries and tries to get you to. But maybe even more, he tries to plant doubts in your hearts and minds. Yes, Jesus rose from the dead, *but does it really matter?* Does it really matter *for you?* Yeah, *Jesus* is risen, but death continues on, cemeteries are still full of people, funeral homes are not going out of business any time soon, and you're going to die, too. *So who really won?*

But don't believe it! Jesus' resurrection is the hole in the dyke of death that is going to bring the whole thing crashing down. Crashing down on the last day, when all the dead are raised in a great flood of victory and life. And satan won't be able to spin that day. The only spinning going on that day will be as satan is finally flushed down the abyss, once and for all.

For you see, satan, your spin cannot stand against the Word of God. This is exactly as Jesus said it would be - and not only in what He Himself told His disciples, but what He spoke through the prophet Isaiah some 700 years earlier: ***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; . . . the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth . . . It will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."***

700 years earlier, God said through the prophet Isaiah that ***on this mountain*** - Mount Calvary - Jesus would ***swallow up death forever***; that He would ***take away the reproach of his people*** - our sin and death. And the result? ***It will be said on that day, Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him*** - and here it is, satan: ***that he might save us***. He didn't do it to save Himself, but to save us. He took our sin to save us from our sins. He took our death to save us from death. He took on you, satan, to save us from you. And you know what the message of the angel

means, satan? **He is risen; he is not here** means you, satan, have lost. And in Jesus, we have won.

Spin it however you like, satan, but that's the truth. And that flood of victory and life that will come crashing through on the last day, it has, in fact, already begun. For the flood of Holy Baptism keeps poking holes in your mighty dyke of death, satan! Every time a person is baptized, satan, *you lose*. Another hole. Another person joined to Jesus in His death and resurrection. Another *stone being rolled away* . . .

And this is what St. Paul says is of first importance for us; the most important thing to know and cling to: **that Christ died for our sins, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day**. And to hold fast to this word, in faith. For this is our victory. This is our hope.

Hold fast to this word when faced with death, and know that death is not the end of the story. **Hold fast to this word** when faced with your sins, and know that you are forgiven - the wages of your sin (Rom 6:23) have been paid in full. **Hold fast to this word** when the world seems to be falling apart, and see here the start of the new creation. **Hold fast to this word** when satan tries to convince you that you don't matter, or that you're not good enough for Christ - and see here how much you do matter to Christ and what He did for you; not because you were good enough, but because He loves you. **Hold fast to this word** and do not be afraid. Because of this day, because of the resurrection, there is now nothing to be afraid of. The monster of death has been slain, and life reigns.

Hold fast to this word. That's faith. The faith given to you by the Spirit through the Word. That's hard sometimes, as it was for those women that first Easter morning. But the God who has made you His own, who sent His Son to die for you, who raised Him from death, who gave you His Spirit, and who has proclaimed this word to you, will give you the faith that you need. You'll have your moments, like the women, of **trembling and astonishment** - that's okay! The Lord will see you through those times, as He did for them. That's part of his victory, too, you know. To give you faith, to keep you in the faith, and to give you the goal of your faith - to be with Him, not dead but alive, in the life that has no end.

That, too, is happening even now. Just as the flood of Jesus' victory is being poured out now, so too is He with you now. And it is Isaiah who told us about that, too, when he said: **On this mountain** - Mount Calvary, remember . . . On this mountain, Jesus would *not only* swallow up death forever - **the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast!** And not just any feast, but a feast of feasts, the best of all feasts! **Of rich food, of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined**. This heavenly feast is what awaits all who are in Christ. And yet just as the

flood of Jesus' victory has begun, though its fullness will be on the last day, so too His feast. For what richer food, what greater drink could there be than our Lord's own Body and Blood? What could be of more benefit to us here in this life? Five star restaurants have nothing on this meal . . . *if you **hold fast to the word***, and see here, by faith, what cannot be seen with the eyes. That here is the feast where we are joined by *the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven!* That here is the Body and Blood of our Lord Himself, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins. *To keep and preserve you steadfast unto everlasting life.*

So yes, ***trembling and astonishment*** have their day, but joy and life are yours forever. Because of this day. Because the grave is empty. Because *The Strife is O'er, the Battle Done* (LSB #464). Because *Christ is risen!* [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!] Alleluia!

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 faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.