

Jesu Juva

“The Angel and the Word of Life”

Text: Matthew 28:1-10 (Acts 10:34-43; Exodus 15:1b [Introit])

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.

There's an angel again, at the tomb. A messenger of God. The angels are always around Jesus. There to announce Jesus' coming to Mary, there at Jesus' birth, there with Jesus in the wilderness, there with Jesus in His agony in Gethsemane, and now at His empty tomb. They *would have* been there with Jesus to prevent His arrest. For Jesus had told His disciples: *Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels* (Matthew 26:53)? But He did not make such an appeal. Better the one angel at the empty tomb than twelve legions preventing it. Better for us. Jesus had come for this battle, the battle of the cross. The battle against sin, darkness, death, devil, and all the forces of hell. To fight this battle alone. Himself.

And for a time, it seemed as if the forces of hell had won. Even though Jesus had told His disciples numerous times that He would be killed but rise again on the third day, seeing Jesus on the cross, then seeing His lifeless body being taken down and then laid in a tomb made it tough to remember such words. Or if they remembered them, to believe them. For as you well know, death and graves are so cold and dark and sad and final . . .

So it was in that sad numbness of heart and mind that the women went to the tomb that first day of the week. It must have been a joyless Passover for them, the day before; a just going through the motions. Perhaps like that first holiday you go through after a loved one has died. You do all the same things, the same traditions, but it's not the same. There's a hole, a void, a certain aching joylessness that's hard to overcome. So it probably also was with the women . . . *until they got to the tomb.*

For they're not the only ones there. Oh, the guards they expected, but not the angel! And they expected dead *Jesus*, not guards that had become like dead men! This was a most unusual and unexpected scene.

But notice: the women did not tremble and become as dead like the guards. Yes, the guards who were the trained soldiers, who were the brave and hardened ones, who were ready to fight and die for their country, trembled. But we are not told the women did. *Why not?* What was the difference between the soldiers and the women that caused such different reactions?

The Word of God.

The angel who descended from heaven and caused the earth to quake, whose appearance was like lightning and his clothing white as snow, came down and sat on the gravestone *and said nothing to the guards*. He just sat there in His awesomeness and they were terrified.

But to the women - who saw the same thing as the guards - *the angel spoke*. He spoke the Word of God. ***Do not be afraid***, he said. It's okay. In fact, it's *more* than okay! ***For I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, he has risen, as he said.*** And though they still have fear - who wouldn't at such a sight? - it is not the paralyzing fear of the soldiers - it is ***fear with great joy***. For they do not just see what they do not understand - they hear the Word of God. They hear the good news that Christ is risen! They hear the Word of God that gives life and the good news that gives joy.

And so it is *for us* still today. Without the Word of God, if God were to remain silent, there is only confusion, fear, and death. But with the Word of God, with the good news of a **resurrected Saviour** and His victory over sin, darkness, death, devil, and all the forces of hell, there is joy and life. It is the Word of God that makes all the difference in the world. The Word of God made flesh that did it. And the Word of God that proclaims that truth now to us. That Jesus has gone before us in the fight, the incarnate God goes through death and to life again, and so you need not be afraid.

For as the angel once said: *Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. All* people, for as Peter said: ***God shows no partiality***. Or as Paul put it: *For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive* (1 Cor 15:22). So good news of great joy that will be for all the people. *For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger* (Luke 2:10-12).

Just as the angel once announced that, so now he announces (and I paraphrase): ***Do not be afraid***, *for I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. For unto you is risen this day from the grave a Savior, Jesus of Nazareth, who is Christ the Lord. And this is a sign for you, you will see him no longer wrapped in grave cloths and lying in a tomb - he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him.*

And this is the message that is proclaimed to you today, to give you joy and life.

That when your sin weighs heavy upon you and you feel its awful, condemning weight, you hear the message: *Jesus is risen! Your sin is forgiven.*

That when the darkness of despair, or loneliness, or hopelessness, or suffering seems to be engulfing you, you hear the message: *Jesus is risen! He lives to give you hope and light and love.*

That when death suddenly appears on your doorstep coming for you or for a loved one, and seems so cold and dark and final, you hear the message: *Jesus is risen! Death has been defeated. The grave could not hold Him, and it cannot hold you.*

That when the devil whispers in your ear that you are unworthy, that your sins are too great, that its all a hoax, all a myth, all untrue, you hear the message: *Jesus is risen! The tomb is empty. He is victorious.*

And that when all the forces of hell and this world seem arrayed against you and your life is a mess and nothing seems to be going right, you hear the message: *Jesus is risen! That's what the cross looked like, too. But I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously.* He has triumphed gloriously, **for you!**

This is the message, this is the Word of God, that makes all the difference in the world. That we not only be no longer afraid to die, **we no longer be afraid to live either.** And I think that's sometimes even a bigger problem - being afraid to live. *Isn't that the fear that so gripped the disciples now?* And for us, too, so often. Afraid to live in my situation, afraid to live with my suffering, afraid to live with my disease, afraid to live with the bad news I just received, afraid to live when I don't know what the future holds. Afraid to live with my spouse, afraid to live without my spouse. Afraid to live with my child, afraid to live without my child. Afraid to repent, afraid to forgive, afraid to grow up, afraid to grow old, afraid to leave, afraid to stay, afraid to serve, afraid to give, afraid to say the wrong thing, afraid to say the right thing, afraid of the news, afraid of no news, afraid that maybe I'm going to screw it all up . . . or that I already have.

For you, then, is this *message of good news and great joy!* **Do not be afraid! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!** And because He lives, you also shall live. What you fear, whatever you fear, is not greater than He. For He who has defeated all your enemies has promised to see you through whatever comes in this life as well. Even death. Truly, in Christ, you have nothing to fear.

Which doesn't mean you won't still have fear. Especially at death. You will. You're human and your sinful nature is still clinging to you. The women at the tomb still had fear as well - but at the same time, with **great joy.** Which sounds like our funerals, doesn't it? Fear and sadness, yet with great joy. That's faith. Living in a world of sin and death with great joy and hope in Christ Jesus.

And so the women, in their fear *and great joy,* having heard the Word of God, **quickly depart** to tell the disciples . . . when another unexpected happens: *Jesus meets them.* And

I must say, our English translation here next is, quite frankly, *terrible!* It says that **Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!”** The word is actually the word for **joy**. *Rejoice! Be full of joy!* He says. And with Him, they are. God’s Word gives what it says. This day has transformed everything. Jesus is full of joy, and so too *they*. And so too *you*. You who have heard the message and now meet Jesus **in His Supper**, not *taking hold of His feet* like the women, but taking hold of Him by eating His Body and drinking His Blood. For here is where He is for us today, with the same joy, with the same life, with the same love and forgiveness. The you be full of joy. That you be full of life.

And as we do, *guess what?* The angels are here! But we don’t just hear them now, we sing with them! Singing with the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven: *Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth* (Isaiah 6:3)! The song of heaven. The song of those raised with Christ in baptism, and who now look forward to our resurrection with Christ to a life that will never end. That’s you. So come and receive the pledge of your Saviour, the forgiveness, life, and salvation given here for you in His Body and Blood.

And then like the women, go and be an angel, a messenger of God, to those in trouble, those in fear, those who don’t know. And tell them the joy and hope that you have. That:

*Christ is Risen, and you, O death, are annihilated!
Christ is Risen, and the evil ones are cast down!
Christ is Risen, and the angels rejoice!
Christ is Risen, and life is liberated!
Christ is Risen, and the tomb is emptied of its dead;
for Christ having risen from the dead,
is become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.*

(John Chrysostom, Easter homily c. 400 AD)

The first-fruits - which means there’s a lot more empty tombs coming! Which means that’s the future of your tomb as well. For this is our triumph day! This is our day of joy and life! For yes: **Alleluia! 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.