

Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ
Amen.

The sermon this morning is based on the four gospel accounts of the resurrection, focusing on the gospel according to Matthew 28:1-10.

Let us pray ...

Heavenly Father, as we come to the end of our Easter remembrance period, continue to remind us of your life-giving sacrifice throughout the coming year. Continue to draw us back to you when we have turned from you and sinned. Guide the words of our mouths to be the light of the world, and keep the meditations of our hearts pure, so that they will be acceptable to you at all times. We pray through your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Title He has risen; He is not here

Jesus said, *"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."* Today we celebrate that third day ...

Christ has risen!

As we worship today and think about the events of that morning by the tomb, let us spare a thought for those women who discovered that the body of Jesus had gone. Their feelings are probably easier to imagine than to put into words. *"Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"—which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* (Matt 27:46)

How do you think you would have felt?

Only a couple of days ago they had lost a much-loved friend and teacher, the man who had come to be their hope for the future. How solemn would they have been as they walked to Jesus tomb on that morning, their eyes were most likely looking down to the ground. I'm sure that their hearts were heavy with sorrow and loss, with fear and disbelief, and also with guilt and shame.

As we heard in the Gospel according to St. Mark, the two women had with them perfumes that they had prepared the previous night so that they could finish the job of preparing Jesus body in accordance with the Jewish burial rites. As they walked it would be fair to say that the beauty of the new morning was most likely lost to them; their spirits crushed by the memories of how the Jewish elders and chief priests had treated Jesus.

As these women neared the tomb, they discussed how they were going to get to Jesus' body, because they were unable to roll the rock that sealed the tomb aside by themselves. But as they approached His tomb, there was a great earthquake, and an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.

Imagine the shock and dread that would have flooded their already troubled hearts.

As they approached the tomb, instead of finding the body of Jesus they are greeted by a heavenly angel, who says to them, *do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here.* Although being told to not be afraid, it must actually have been terrifying – as we heard, the guards at the tomb trembled and passed out from fear. And we get a greater sense of the panic that gripped these women, especially Mary Magdalene, whom in St. John's account of the resurrection ran to some of Christ's disciples and said *they have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!*

But is this any wonder though? What had these women gone through in the recent events?

Their Lord is arrested, beaten and sentenced to death and no one stood by Him; He was killed, murdered and then His body goes missing, surely this was a stark contrast to how things were supposed to be.

The accounts of the resurrection are an echo of what Christ went through on the night He was betrayed. Not just for these two women, but also for all His followers; what had gone so horribly wrong, so that the man who claimed to be the Son of God was now dead. Through the panic and fear that is expressed in these accounts we do hear an echo of Christ's words *my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* His followers were feeling something remotely similar with their feelings of loss, of emptiness and of disconnectedness from what they had been taught. Christ's death had isolated them from the one who had given them hope for their future.

Aren't the words of Jesus also the same words that we so often want to cry out? Too often we too feel like we have been abandoned; we feel like we have been left to fend for ourselves, that God isn't there, or does have time to hear our calls for help. We can empathize with those feelings of loss, emptiness and disconnectedness.

These feelings overcome us in times when we cannot bring ourselves to look towards Christ's death on the cross for our forgiveness. They are the times when our hearts are so burdened with sorrow, loss, fear, guilt and shame due to the sins that we have committed. Times when we are fearful, when we shake our heads in disbelief, those times when we are racked with the guilt and shame of what we have done or have failed to do. These are the times when we begin to despair, and we end up trading hope for fear of death.

On the night of his death Christ suffered alone. He suffered like this because He is the Son of God. The Father sent the Son to do what humanity could not. He was the only one who could save the world from sin. On the cross Jesus took upon Himself the death that we deserve as punishment for our sin. For our sake He was hung on an implement of horrendous torture; He was nailed by His hands and feet to the cross and there on that cross He was truly alone, He had been abandoned by all on earth and he had been abandoned by the Father to suffer for the sin of this world.

Through Christ's death on the cross God has shown us His grace and mercy. He knows all our weaknesses and is able to sympathize with them because He was tempted in every way, just as we are—yet He was without sin; by His dying on the cross Christ paid the ultimate price for the forgiveness of our sins. In death He has released us; we have been set free from the condemnation that leads to our eternal death.

When the two women entered the tomb, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. But the angel said to them, *I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.* St. John's gospel tells us that instead of the wrapped body of Christ there were now only *the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, [was] not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself* (John 20:6-7). Christ has risen; He had been resurrected, not just spiritual but also physically.

In the gospel account according to Luke, the angels ask the two women, *why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen* (Luke 24:5-6). Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Lord of the living, and when we place our trust in Him we can rest assured that we too will be raised up. Jesus promises, *truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life* (John 5:24).

Therefore, we no longer need to live in fear of death. Just as Christ has risen from the dead, by the virtue of being joined to Him by baptism we too will rise from the dead. Not by our own strength, but through faith in Him. Through His resurrection we find hope amongst the hopelessness of our world, we know that we are not abandoned and left to fend for ourselves. What a marvelous thing to know. Our Lord and Saviour has risen from the grave; He has triumphed over death, in order to lead those who are living in death back to life. *“Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live (John 5:26).*

In knowing that Christ died for the forgiveness of sins, and that he has risen from the dead to eternal life, *let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Heb 4:16).* So go forward with certainty, having been assured of our salvation by the hope that we have in what Christ has done for us.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen