

Matthew 28:1-10
The Resurrection of Our Lord
April 5, 2026

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

Behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid."

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Twice in our reading, we hear this phrase, "Do not be afraid" ... first from the angels, then from Jesus Himself. Maybe we know the phrase better as "Fear not." And maybe *that* phrase, first said by the angels at Jesus' incarnation and birth, brings to mind the *other* pinnacle of the Church's festivals... of course, Christmas.

At Christmas, we hear of that little town and of the little child in swaddling cloths whose birth made that little town famous, so that – of both, really – the Christmas hymn confesses, "The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight."

As certainly as God had become flesh, the Christ had become incarnate, the child had been laid in the manger – certainly, what hope is ours! What promise! What confidence in the face of all doubt and fear!

But, what if that child, that Incarnate Christ who grew in wisdom and in the favor of God... what if that Christ went with steely resolve to the cross, was laid in the tomb... but never rose from the grave? Would the hopes and fears of all the years still have been met

in him? Or would all the promises and hopes and confidence been for naught? The doubts and fears seizing us forever!

As much as we rejoice in the *incarnation* of our God, what good is it if He – in flesh and blood – lay dead in the tomb? What good is the incarnation without the resurrection? It means nothing!

And what good would the death of Christ be if we knew not – had no certainty, could in no way tell – if it actually accomplished anything? ... if he went to the cross, died on the cross, remained dead... Would we have any reason to hope? Would we not have every reason to fear? St Paul says, “If Christ is not raised from the dead... if in Christ we have hope in *this* life only, we are of all men to be most pitied. But, in fact,” Paul says, “*in fact*, Christ is raised from the dead!”

Sometimes, when we use the phrase, “in fact,” we mean, “In my opinion” or “in my supposed expertise.” But when Paul uses the phrase, he means,

‘Go ahead – question! Challenge! The truth is undeniable! In that same flesh and blood truth, in the same flesh and blood history that the same Incarnate Christ was laid in the manger, the same incarnate Christ was crucified on the cross and laid in the tomb... in that same flesh and blood truth of history, the same incarnate Christ is risen from the dead – never to die again, for death has no dominion over him, but He Himself holds the keys over death and the grave!’

And, as that is so, as Christ is risen from the dead, then the hopes and fears of all the years are not only *still* met in Him, but *forever* met in Him. Indeed, on account of the resurrection, the joy of the incarnation *returns* and the glorious glow of Christmas remains yours.

Indeed, consider this: On this joyous Easter morn, it's not just the Alleluias that return to the Divine Service, but it's also the hymn of the angels, the great *Gloria in Excelsis Deo* – “Glory be to God on high; and on earth peace, goodwill to men” – that hymn of that night in which Christ incarnate was born. That hymn would have been lost forever, meaningless forever, had Christ proven to be inferior to Sin and Death. It's almost as if, during the Lenten season, when that hymn is put away, it's almost as if the heavenly chorus is collectively holding its breath, the angels asking each other, “Was it worth singing this? Were we premature? Was this all in vain?” ... just as Paul says, my preaching would be in vain and your faith would be in vain... likewise, the angelic chorus heralding would be in vain if the incarnation led only to the Christ's burial and defeat.

But then, when Christ is raised from the dead, the glorious hymn trumpets forth again: “Glory be to God on High.” And, with it, a new song, “Alleluia!” Yes, the Christ, He who became flesh and humbly entered human history, the Christ has overcome in the flesh and gloriously changed the course of human history. His sacrificial death is sufficient. His messianic mission complete. Everything tied to

His Name is vindicated: our hopes are vindicated. His promises vindicated. Sin, death, and the devil vanquished... because this Jesus is risen from the dead.

And, therefore, what do we have to fear? “Fear not,” the angel says. “Fear not,” the risen Lord himself says. That may sound like a simple comfort, but the truth of Christ’s resurrection makes it a mighty fortress of comfort... even in the face of those things we fear the most:

When we fear **physical affliction, suffering, even death itself...** to say, “Christ is risen *from the dead*” – suddenly my fears of death are evaporated, the grave is toothless; my hopes are vindicated, and I too will share in that resurrection!

When we fear **our sins** and wonder whether or not our sins have actually been paid for... when we worry, “I know Jesus hung on the cross, but was it actually sufficient? Are my sins actually forgiven?”, then we hear the proclamation, “Christ is risen!”, and we may say, “yes, his sacrifice *was* sufficient, or else he would still be in the grave. But, since he is risen, his cross was sufficient. He is the God-man He claims to be, with all authority of heaven and earth. His righteousness and our justification pour forth. I too will share in his resurrection.

When you’re afraid of **all those enemies of the Gospel** who mock and malign you for your faith and hope in Christ, where will *they* be when you rejoice in the resurrection and the glory of your eternal share in Christ’s inheritance?

When you’re afraid **you don’t have ‘your best life now’** – well, of course you don’t! – the resurrection is coming! Life everlasting is

coming. Any teaching and supposed gospel out there that focuses on ‘your best life now’ misses the point entirely... that Jesus has redeemed you that you might have a share in His victory over the grave and your best life *then*, when He comes again in glory.

Yes, remember, His resurrection makes certain even His promised second coming... which, of course, is the date and time of your resurrection... even if that date and time seems so far off as to be in constant doubt. Indeed, because of Jesus’ resurrection, *nothing* of who He is or what He says is in doubt... even if one claims Christ’s words and promises don’t make sense to human reason. Nothing should be reinterpreted to ‘make more sense,’ because – at the time – His claim that He would rise again didn’t make sense! Are we forgetting that! There was a time in history when such a claim/concept of ‘resurrection’ was outlandish! But, suddenly, in a moment, it is no longer spoken of as outlandish! It may be debated what his resurrection in history means *for you*, but the fact of His resurrection proves that the very *idea* of resurrection is no longer an outlandish claim or symbolic concept. And, because *that* claim of His bodily resurrection proved trustworthy, we ought hang on *every* word that comes from this mouth of Jesus!

So, what do you make of Jesus *and his Word*? Must we admit that, even if we acknowledge His resurrection, we are prone to doubt His Word? And yet, ought His resurrection not silence any doubt of His Word and promises?:

When we doubt and fear the words of His promises of Baptism – “How mysteriously glorious is this claim! Can it really be so?” – yet in

His resurrection, He proves that He has power over death and the grave, that He is God of God and “all authority has been given” to Him, that He can make a promise regarding our baptismal adoption into an eternal inheritance and *deliver* on that promise, even with plain water.

When we fear or doubt whether the forgiveness of sins actually does anything for us, whether the declaration of the servant is of any benefit for us, we can say, “But, here is the risen Christ!... the risen Christ, who on the night of his resurrection said to his servants, ‘Whoever’s sins you forgive, they are forgiven!’”

When we doubt the words of His New Testament and its meal, the words of His Sacrament and Supper, we can say, “Nevertheless, not only did he promise it, not only did he seal it with his death, but he promised it to be His very body, which is now the very risen body, the very blood of immortal life... for He is the very risen and immortal Lord and God-man! So, what prevents Him from now delivering that meal to me? I cannot doubt it. I need not doubt it. I ought not doubt it, for it is just as he said!”

How easy it is for us to doubt – to be afraid of – His Word regarding such divine and precious gifts of His own choosing and institution. “The Feast of Victory for our God? At the Lamb’s high feast we sing? - Too bizarre!” some might say. “Too bold, too outlandish! Not believable!” others claim.

But, is there any declaration more unbelievable, more boldly bizarre, more defiantly daring, than this assertion made in history: “I will rise again. Destroy this temple, in three days I will raise it up again. No

one takes my life from me; I lay it down and I take it up again”? Is there anything more outside of or without historical precedent in our world of death, any claim more naturally doubt-inducing, anything so outlandish, so *not* believable?... should be so easy to refute! But, all of the first century knows – even as eyewitnesses were confessing, even before Gospel accounts were being written, Epistles were being sent, martyrs were suffering – all the first century knows, there stands the empty tomb. Christ has conquered, and His blunt and bold Word is undeniable! Our doubts are silenced, His naysayers tongue-tied, our hopes vindicated, His promises guaranteed.

Yes, all of the fears and all of the hopes and all of the promises of all the years are met in Jesus and in His resurrection. To be sure, the cross is the *heart* of your justification, the *heart* of your salvation... that justification before God and His judgment seat, the clear conscience before God. It is the foundation on which everything is built and Jesus’ own status is eternally known, so that of the risen Jesus Paul proclaims, “We preach Christ crucified.” But, that status – that title – is only believed and trusted through the resurrection; the resurrection of Jesus is, if you will, the justification of Christ’s trustworthiness before my own trembling heart, before my own uncertain mind.

Sometimes, we are even more afraid of our hearts’ doubt than of God’s judgment, aren’t we? The increasingly well-known hymn of great glory sings, “Then by your resurrection you won for us **reprieve**; you opened heaven’s kingdom to all who would believe.” Well, certainly by the cross He won for us the objective reprieve – justification in the

courtroom of God. But, by His resurrection, Jesus (if you will) “won for us” a vindication over my own doubting heart, a justification before my cynical Old Adam, a certainty before my own mind, all my tremblings and fears.

Indeed, this is a most powerful certainty... not only before my own Old Adam, but in confessing Christ before the world and *every* Old Adam. I mentioned in Bible Study just last Sunday, for those loved ones outside the joy and safety of the Lutheran Confession, you can simply ask them, “What do you make of the person of Jesus?” *Anyone* can say, “Well, I believe he was a good person, a good teacher, a well-intended man who died to show his followers how much he loved them, to leave an example of love for his followers.” But, where the cross can be re-interpreted, the resurrection cannot: they must wrestle with the truth – this Jesus redeemed and vindicated his followers; his resurrection proves / vindicates their hope, proves his word is trustworthy, including his word regarding his followers’ own resurrection.

And so, we can go forth in great joy and great certainty, knowing that our victorious Lord and His resurrection means our own present share in His victory and, thus, future share in His resurrection.

This is what St Paul means when he says, “I have been raised with Christ” and, to begin our Epistle Reading, “If *you* have been raised with Christ...” He means the baptismal life tied to Christ’s resurrection and, so, certain of our own. To be sure, when he wrote this, Paul’s own resurrection hadn’t yet happened; it *still* hasn’t happened! But, vindicated by Christ’s own resurrection, we are as good as raised. It is

coming for us as well. Though Paul has had to wait nearly 2000 years, he lived and died (and his soul/spirit dwells in eternal safety) certain that he one day will rise with his own flesh and blood and see God with his own two eyes and not those of another. With Job of old, he is certain that his share in Christ's resurrection is coming.

How many church bodies misinterpret, misunderstand this term "resurrection" to refer to already spiritually being in heaven with Jesus... the soul's peace when "escaping" the body. No, that's not the resurrection... the resurrection is not for the *soul's* benefit, but for the *body's*. And that bodily resurrection is coming.

Why do you think Jesus spent so much time on that Tuesday of Holy Week teaching not about the cross but focusing on His glorious return, on his second coming, when He will raise all the dead and give eternal life to all who believe in Him. This is the great joy of His second coming, the exact date and time of our own resurrection, when Christ gathers His sheep unto Himself, takes us in our own flesh and blood to the place he has prepared for us, and the everlasting marriage banquet of the Lamb in His kingdom commences before your own two eyes and not those of another.

Thus, "do not be afraid... Fear not." For "Jesus lives. The victory's won."

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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