

Mark 16:1-8 The proof of the empty tomb! Easter Festival Service April 5, 2015

By Pastor Kenneth Mellon, Trinity Lutheran Church and School, Pleasant Valley Rd., West Bend, WI

God's grace and peace are yours and from our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

God's written proof that Jesus' work is complete and certain to save us is in Mark 16:1-8 -read responsively
Jesus lives! The victory's won! Death no longer can appall me; Jesus lives! Death's reign is done! From the grave Christ will recall me. Brighter scenes will then commence; This shall be my confidence. Amen.

Dear Christian Friends,

Can you imagine being among the women walking to Jesus' tomb on that first Easter morning? Some of them had been at the foot of the cross and saw Jesus die. They were shocked about losing Jesus to the power of death when they had trusted in Him to save them from eternal death. Perhaps, they were thinking that Jesus would rise at the end of the world. But, they couldn't imagine Him coming alive in less than three full days! Death was nothing new to them. They all had had relatives who died. They knew the protocol of buying spices and fragrant oils and showing their last respects for the one they loved by anointing the body. It seemed it was the only thing that they could do for Jesus now that He died. But, that first Sunday changed everything for them. They wouldn't look at death in the same way on account of:

The proof of the empty tomb!

First, they needed hope because their circumstances. Mark wrote that these women were up *"very early in the morning"* and they *"came to the tomb bringing spices which they had prepared."* (v.1, 2) Two of the women, Mary Magdalene and Mary the wife of Clopas, had followed the procession to the tomb. They noted exactly where it was so they could return as soon as possible after the Sabbath rest. At the time, they only knew that Jesus was dead. Their only question as they walked to the tomb was, *"who will roll the stone away from the entrance?"* (v.3) They couldn't imagine that the tomb would be empty.

We are accustomed to death, too. We have had grandparents, parents, spouses, friends, and children who have died. We have felt that empty and lonely feeling just as the women did who came to Jesus' grave. We do what we can to show our respects at funerals and by bringing flowers to grave sites for those we've loved. For us, as for the women, death seems permanent. Death is no respecter of persons. Someday it will come to all of us. It isn't the way that God created man, but it is the result of sin that all of us will die. And the best we can do is to have a funeral or show our respects in another way like the women tried to do.

The only people who welcomed Jesus' death were His enemies. To them, His death was the solution they needed. He had accused them of not caring for the people and of rejecting Him and their God who had sent Him with great power. In their minds, His words could now be forgotten. Except, they remembered that Jesus said: He would rise from the dead on the third day. To be sure that no one disturbed His body; they asked Pilate to post a guard at the tomb. No one would get in or out of that sealed tomb or so they thought. Their evil plans seemed to cover every possibility. But, there was one thing they couldn't prepare for.

Second, the empty tomb showed the truth! Matthew wrote that the guards at the tomb saw the angel descend from heaven and hurl the stone aside. After the guards fled, the women arrived. Looking inside the tomb, they did not see Jesus' body. Instead, an angel sat where He had been. He said, *"Don't be alarmed... You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him."* (v.6) The body of Jesus, the humble Nazarene, was gone. Jesus the Savior was alive! He truly had died by crucifixion; but God raised Him from death just as He promised! The stone

where His body was placed still had the cloth that had been around Jesus. But, the cloths were empty. Even the cloth that had been around His head was neatly folded and placed by itself. (John 20:5) Jesus truly was alive! The Jews and Romans couldn't stop Him from coming to life. They couldn't keep Him locked in His tomb. The risen Savior could appear anywhere He wanted and at any time!

The women at first were overwhelmed with fear and amazement. Such power over death was too much for them to comprehend. At first they fled from the tomb. They didn't speak to anyone as they headed back to their homes. Yet, we know from other accounts that as Jesus appeared to more people, they also came forward and told what they had seen. Sadly, there are many people today who don't believe in any miracles. Some have even made movies and have claimed that either Jesus never really died or that His followers only dreamed that He came back to life. But, if they are right, that means we have Savior who can't keep His promises. For Jesus clearly promised that He would die and rise on the third day. Paul wrote, *"If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins."* (1 Corinthians 15:17)

Every Easter or whenever we hear or read of Jesus' resurrection, it should fill us with awe, too. God through His Son, who became one of us, has overcome our worst enemy in life, which is death. Like the women, we too can tell others what a great victory Jesus won for us all. He has brought life to us! Those who believe in Him have passed from death to life. Right now in the country of Kenya, Africa, there many people mourning. Muslim extremists attacked and killed 142 college students at their school. They targeted Christian students. Many families will be dealing with unexpected deaths. It will be difficult for them all. But, the news of Christ's resurrection will comfort them. Christ has risen from His horrific death and all who believe in Him will follow Him to life! The evil in this world makes us feel sick. But, even if people take innocent Christian lives, they can't stop Christ anymore than the Roman guards kept Him in the tomb.

Third, there are far-reaching blessings from the empty tomb. When we confess that we believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we aren't just basing our faith on an empty tomb. God's Word tells us that Jesus appeared to the women as they were returning to the city. He also appeared to many other men and women to show that He was alive. Paul wrote that He appeared to *500 people at one time.* (1Cor. 15:6) Even the Apostle Paul, the former persecutor, came to faith in Christ when he saw Jesus alive.

We have God's Word of these truths and from it we believe what it states, *"He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."* (Romans 4:25) The resurrection and the empty tomb are God's proof that Jesus' payment for our sins is complete. In the resurrection of Christ, God declared that all who believe in Him will have eternal life. Jesus said, *"Because I live, you also will live!"* (John 14:19) It will not just be souls of believers in heaven. At Jesus' promise on the Last Day, there will be millions of empty tombs as He raises all the dead. All who believe in Him as their Savior will be with Him in a new heaven and earth. Death and the grave will be things of the past for we will live with Him forever!

We can say with confidence: Morning breaks upon the tomb; Jesus scatters all its gloom. Day of triumph through the skies; See the glorious Savior Rise. You who are of death afraid, triumph in the scattered shade. Drive your anxious cares away; See the place where Jesus lay. Christians, dry your flowing tears, Chase your unbelieving fears; Look on His deserted grave, Doubt no more His power to save. Amen.