

Matthew 28:5-7 Rejoice in Jesus' victory over death! Easter Sunrise Service April 1, 2018

Grace and peace are yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen
God's Word that describes the victory of Christ over death is written in Matthew 28:5-7
These are Your Words heavenly Father. Strengthen us by Your truth for eternal life. Your Word is truth.

Dear Christian Friends, in the name of our living Savior,

Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! We spoke those words with joy and confidence this morning as we began our service. Why are we so confident that He is risen? Some skeptics think that one day researchers will find a coffin or cave with Jesus' bones in it! Why don't we believe them? God's Word is clear: Jesus rose from the dead. The place where they lay Him in the tomb was empty. He was seen alive by many women and His disciples who were not expecting that He would rise. God's news of resurrection should give us a different outlook on life and on death. We know that life is not permanent here, but that it will be in heaven. Yet, what we see in life seems the opposite: death seems permanent here, and heaven is in question. By faith we know that for believers the end of life will be a great day of joy. But, why wait?

Rejoice now in Jesus' victory over death!

First, there can be no better encouragement for us! Easter should always be a glorious day for Christians, even if it's cold outside or if we have problems. There are times in life when we may feel uncertain about our future just like the women and Jesus' disciples on that first Easter morning. Sometimes we need God's Word to help us remember that Jesus is God's Son and He has a plan for us and He is always in control. Earlier Jesus had told His disciples all that would happen to Him. But, they didn't want to listen. So, when evil things happened to Jesus, they weren't ready. They asked, How could Jesus, the Son of God and Savior, allow these things to happen to Him? The disciples saw His death as a defeat and an end to His ministry.

Perhaps at times our lives seem out of our control. We may wonder why God allows troubles or illness to happen to us. We're hoping that Jesus will intervene to help us with what we think should be the answer. But God may have a better way just as He did for the women who came to put spices and Jesus' dead body but never did. The risen Christ changed everything! Easter means that despite disappointments in life, victory in Christ is ours and for all who believe in Him. We need encouragement in His promises.

When the women arrived at the tomb looking for Jesus' body, an angel appeared. What He said was more striking than his bright appearance, *"Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; He has risen, just as He said. Come and see the place where He lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee.'"* (v.5-7) The first thing the angel did was to speak amazing words of encouragement. Yes, they were at the right tomb. Jesus had been buried there. The grave cloths were still wrapped and laying on the stone, but His body was gone! He had come to life just as He said. The words "just as He said" are important. Jesus didn't instantly appear to the women. He first let them hear His Word to remind them of His promises. He said, *"The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise."* (Mark 9:31) He said, *"No one takes [My life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again."* (John 10:18) It all happened just as He said!

Sometimes we may get anxious about what is happening in the world. We would love to see Jesus appear and destroy evil in the world and stop the influence of sin and the devil. Also, we want to be with loved ones who died by having Jesus appear and raise them from death. Instead, all we have right now are Jesus' promises just like the women who first were comforted by God's Word.

Jesus appeared to them later that morning. By then God's Word had done its work. There is no mention of fear or running away from Jesus. They instantly ran to Him and worshipped Him. Their tears must have drenched the ground as eyes overflowed with tears of joy! Jesus was risen!

Both the angel and Jesus told them to tell His disciples. The angel said, "*Go quickly and tell his disciples that He has risen...!*" (v.7) How comforting that news must have been to His disciples! They had earlier slept while Jesus prayed. They had run when He was captured. Most were in hiding during the crucifixion. On Easter morning they are nowhere near the tomb. Yet, Jesus still included them despite their weakness. He sent a message through the women, "*Go and tell My brothers to go to Galilee.*" (v. 10) He still called them brothers! He set up an appointed time to meet with them back in their home territory!

What a blessing that first Easter was for them! They didn't deserve to be called Jesus' family, and neither do we. We are no better than they were. We too often fail to love and serve God and help people as God demands. Without Christ, sin would separate us from God forever. But, Jesus suffered our depths of hell and died to pay for all sins. By His holy life all believers in Christ have become dear children of God. This is the victory of Easter! In sports tournaments only one team wins. The rest of the teams lose. But, Jesus' victory is our victory, too! He has earned heaven for us! His resurrection is the proof of our rising from death. The world says, in the midst of life we are in death. A Christian who trusts in Christ says, In the midst of death, we have life! Jesus is our life. He is our risen Savior! That Easter news encourages us!

Second, the living Savior gives us joy in His victory. Wouldn't it be great if God's angel or Jesus Himself appeared to us to answer our questions or guide us as we make decision or if we're trying to get through a tough time in life? According to Peter, it was better to hear God's Word and have the Holy Spirit guide us than to see Jesus. After describing Jesus' transfigured glory, He wrote, "*We have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.*" (2 Peter 1:19) Peter is saying that life will not always be happy. But God's Word gives us a joy that no one can take away. The disciples doubted the words of the women at first. Then, Jesus appeared to them and they believed and were glad. As He met with His followers back Galilee, He focused them back to His Word. Jesus would soon ascend to heaven and they wouldn't see Him anymore. Yet, as He promised, He would be with them always!

So, do you want joy in the victory of Easter? You've come to the right place! God has proclaimed that victory to you in Christ who died to forgive your sins and He offered His forgiveness to you through His Word and in the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Jesus promised: *I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.... And you will see Me. Because I live, you also will live.*" (John 14:18-19) His promise is our reason for joy! Our risen Savior in His gracious Word is with us. We don't need to fear. If Jesus can conquer death during His time of weakness, He can help us now that He has all authority in heaven and on earth. We are certain of it because He is risen! Even our graves will one day become our entrance to eternal life. At that time we will see Jesus in all His glory. The Bible promises that in heaven we will reflect His glory. Then, everything will be made clear about the path to victory that He won for us.

While we wait to see Him, He brings His blessings to us through His Word and we would do well to read and listen often to His joyful message of encouragement! CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED! ALLELUJAH! Amen.