

Matthew 28:5-7 Rejoice in Jesus' victory over death! Easter Festival Service March 27, 2016
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Grace and peace are yours from God our Father and from our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen
God's Word that describes Christ's victory over death is written in Matthew 28:5-7
These are Your Words heavenly Father. Strengthen us for life by Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen

Dear People of God in the name of the Risen Savior,

Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! We spoke those words with confidence this morning as we began our service. But, there have always been some people who doubt. Several years ago, an archeologist found a tomb outside Jerusalem with a stone box inside containing human bones. On the box was the name Jesus, in Hebrew Joshua. The man claimed to have found the bones of Christ. Some liberal Christian churches would not care if it was Christ. They teach that Christ only rose spiritually in the hearts of His disciples and that His spirit lived on in them. But, the Apostle Paul, who saw the living Christ, made it clear, "*If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.*" (*1 Corinthians 15:17*) How do we answer the archeologist? First, there were 1,000's of men at Jerusalem who had the name Jesus. More importantly, God's Word clearly states that Jesus physically rose from death. His tomb was empty. He was seen alive after His resurrection by 500 witnesses, including the women in our verses. We all understand the power of death and that life here is temporary. But, a time will come when death will be powerless and Christ will call all people to life. It will be the happiest day for those who believe in Jesus. But, why wait? Today

Rejoice in Jesus' victory over death!

First, we need this good news to overcome human fears! Easter is supposed to be a joyful day for all believers. But, early on the first Easter morning the women were anything but joyful. They came to Jesus' tomb not knowing the good news. They were prepared to put spices on Jesus' crucified body to honor Him. But, when they arrived at the tomb the heavy stone protecting Jesus' body from harm was moved. As they looked into the dark tomb, suddenly an angel in bright robes appeared inside and spoke to them. He answered their fearful thoughts, "*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.*" (*v.5-6*) The women had experienced a terrible week. They saw Jesus die a violent death. They came to His tomb and found no body, but an angel saying that He was alive! What would be next? Would they die before angel! They had many things to fear!

What may keep us from having joy at Easter? Today, we may be missing someone who is either far away from us or who has died and cannot be here to celebrate Easter. Or are there circumstances in our lives where we feel overwhelmed by what is happening to us? No matter what our problems within or without, God has given us good news to take away our fears. "*Do not be afraid!*" said the angel. "*He is risen, just as He said.*" (*v. 6*) God has kept His Word to save us. At Easter we celebrate the truth that Jesus conquered death and that we who believe in Him will meet again with all believers in heaven. The women at the tomb had thought of Jesus' death as a defeat. God knew that His death as a complete victory. Easter was God's declaration that Jesus won forgiveness and life for all people! Christ gives victory to all who believe in Him.

Second, the Easter message gives joy. The angel said, "*He has risen, just as He said. Come and see the place where He lay.*" (*v.6*) Were the women disappointed to not see the risen Jesus immediately? Once they heard that He was alive, I'm sure that they wanted to see Him now! But at first, they only had God's Word through the angel. It was enough for them. Matthew tells us, "*The women hurried from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy...*" (*v.8*) The angel's word of promise connected to their faith and they responded with a joy that could not be taken away.

In our world, there are bombings by Muslim extremists and we are saddened by the loss of any life of people. Our world is evil. The power of the death and the devil is all too real. We would love to have Jesus appear right now and separate us permanently from all evil. We long to have the risen Jesus take us out of this world to the sinless glory of heaven, where we will be reunited with believers and share the eternal joy of heaven! But, for now we live by faith in God's promises just as the women did at first.

Jesus did physically appear to them later that morning. There is no mention of them being afraid or trying to run away from Him. They instantly recognized Him as their living Savior and ran to Him and held on to Him. Their joy could not be contained! Christ had risen! It was a day to proclaim His victory!

Third, they were to share their news of joy. The angel told them to speak to the disciples. He said, "*Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead...!*"(v.7) How comforting those words must have been! The disciples had earlier slept while Jesus prayed. They had run when He was captured. They were in hiding while He was crucified. On Easter morning they were far from the tomb. Yet, Jesus still included them, calling them His disciples. What a comfort this should be to us. Jesus hadn't risen to condemn believers with weak faith or no faith at the time. As the risen Savior, He wants all to receive the benefits of His innocent death and to find help and refuge in Him at all times.

The men realized that they did not deserve to be called Jesus' disciples and neither do we. We are still sinners too often with little faith. Our sins would separate us from God's love and from heaven were it not for Christ. But He suffered the depths of hell and died to fully pay for our sins. Because of Jesus' holy life, God sees all believers in Christ as His dearly loved children. Christ has risen from death as living proof of God's love. His resurrection is the proof of our resurrection. This is the joyful Easter message we can share with all!

When we experience disappointment, loss or hardship, we can tell the world that Jesus is still our living Savior. We are confident that He will help us. We want people to know that God's Word can encourage them just as it helps us. Through the angel speaking God's Word the first women at the tomb were encouraged. When the disciples later went to Galilee and met the risen Savior, He instructed them with His Word and commanded them to make disciples of all nations by baptizing people and by teaching them.

Christ's Easter victory is still hidden to the world. Too many people consider Easter as an empty celebration. Without God's truth, all they have are Easter eggs, candy and bunnies. The angel told the women, "*Go quickly and tell his disciples that He has risen from the dead.*" (v.7) We have that same joyful news to bring to others who have no joy at Easter.

Many people in the world will sadly continue to believe that Jesus is still dead. But, we don't need to travel to an empty tomb outside Jerusalem to know the truth. God's Word of Jesus' resurrection has convinced us: He has risen! Through His Word we share in His victory. His Word drives away our fears and replaces it with joy! Jesus promised, "*Because I live, you also will live.*" (John 14:19) Our risen Savior is with us, not just in the future when we die, but to help us in life now. Let us joyfully confess to the world: CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED! HALLELUJAH! Amen.