

In the name of ✝ Jesus. Amen.

On Good Friday, our voices were added to the echoes of those that sounded two millennia ago; our hands joined theirs. We betrayed; we denied; we accused; we cried for blood; we condemned; we reviled; we rejected; we nailed; we pierced. You weren't here, you say? We wished you were, for the joy of Easter is so much more delightful when contrasted with the solemnity of Good Friday. But it doesn't matter—it doesn't change the reality, any more than it changed Peter's preaching on Pentecost Sunday, for we all put the Lord of the Cosmos onto that Roman cross; we crucified Him; we buried Him. That was the first day: evening and morning.

Now no work could happen on Saturday, the Sabbath. The body had been hastily prepared for burial because the Sabbath was upon them. They rested; Jesus' body did, too. There was evening and morning: the second day. And now, today is the third day. It began last evening. We kept it in vigil, awaiting fulfillment of the promise. There was evening, and now it is the morning of the first day of the week, the third day, just as He told us.

It is no longer early on that first day, but today we accompany the women as they make their way to Jesus' tomb. But we're different from the women—they were actors in this Divine drama; we're merely observers akin to that early television program hosted by Walter Cronkite that took the viewer back in time to important historical events. I can still hear his closing words: "And you were there."

We're observers today in the most important historical event ever, for I didn't see anybody carrying spices and oils to anoint Jesus' dead body—or perhaps better we are the audience. Yes, we are more the audience today, for we don't get to see what the women saw, we get to hear it. We get to hear the angel's glorious words, "*Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell.*"

And as we hear, we remember Jesus' words spoken only days before, "*Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.*" And we know that Jesus was talking about the very thing we celebrate today. We acknowledge that the most fertile grain of wheat ever did die, but as a grain of wheat sprouts in the spring, bursts forth from the ground, and eventually bears much fruit, so our crucified Lord and Savior Jesus Christ burst forth from His sleeping place in the ground, and He bears much fruit. We're here this Easter morn as that fruit of the seed of Woman. Christ is risen, indeed.

Today we accompany the women heading to the tomb, and as we all go, we overhear the women, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome wondering "*who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?*"

We want to tell them, for we're here, and we already know. The stone has already been "*rolled back*," for we know from Matthew's gospel that the angel with the power of an earthquake rolled it away.

And let's be clear. The women wanted the stone rolled away so that they could anoint Jesus' dead body properly. But the stone was not rolled back for that purpose. And it wasn't rolled back so that Jesus could stumble dazed from the tomb. No, Jesus was already long gone. His spirit, given up at the cross as He breathed His last, has already been reunited with His undecayed body before the early morning encounter. He passed through the stone tomb, descending into the depths of hell to proclaim His victory over the strong man and his followers. So it wasn't for Jesus. Rather, it was for the sake of the women, and the disciples that the stone was rolled away and the tomb opened—that they might see and understand, and then report to us, that we might hear and believe.

And it is absolutely reasonable, historical, and scientific to believe the testimony of the eyewitnesses and what they report as the message of the angel. They saw on this morning a tomb that had been vacated by the One who had died by crucifixion and had been buried there, but whose body had been resurrected to life. They saw and heard a young man—an angel really—who spoke the glorious Gospel message of Easter: "*Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified ... has risen.*"

Of course, the empty tomb is what we might call circumstantial evidence. Something other than resurrection could have happened, and the Jewish leaders concocted stories to tell: the disciples stole Him away, and then said He was resurrected. That's the one the Scriptures record. Other fabrications include: the women lost their way to the tomb; or Jesus didn't really die, but merely swooned, regained His strength, rolled the stone away Himself, and staggered out of the tomb. But none of these did happen, which is why Jesus said through the angel that He would meet up with the disciples, that they would get to see Him—and even touch Him. And so they did, they and many others, even 500 brothers all at one time.

"*Do not be amazed*," said the angel to the women— neither be afraid nor dumbfounded. Yes, this messenger is an angel dressed in dazzling white robes, reflecting the holiness of the God in whose presence he is allowed to stand. But his message is not one of holy law and righteous condemnation; it's not one of wrath and fear. His was a message of Gospel, and therefore, of comfort. "*The one you're looking for isn't here*," he said. "*He's risen.*" Didn't Jesus tell you that all this would happen in this way. This will be Jesus' message over and over again as He meets with His disciples in the days to come. So, why be surprised? Haven't you been witnesses to all the miraculous things Jesus did as He walked among the people, even raising other people from the dead? Now He has raised Himself from

More Than Historical, the Resurrection Is for our Faith — Mark 16:1-8  
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the dead by the glory of the Father. A miracle? You bet. But don't be amazed. He did it just as he told you.

*"You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified."* In these words the angel focuses our Easter ears back on Good Friday, back on the cross, back to His words, *"It is finished."* Jesus is the crucified one; *"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"* But He is the Lamb who has risen, who lives and now reigns.

For the cross and the resurrection should not be separated. When Jesus foretold His passion—whether in a figure of speech like the seed falling to the ground, dying, but sprouting and bearing fruit, or explicitly, when He foretold His death and resurrection, resurrection was always in view, for the CROSS WITHOUT THE RESURRECTION is a pitiable doctrine WITHOUT HOPE. As St. Paul says, *"If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied."* But conversely, an EMPTY tomb without a Christ who has been crucified is an EMPTY doctrine, for apart from the shedding of the blood of the Lamb there is no forgiveness. Again, St. Paul, *"But in fact Christ has been raised FROM THE DEAD, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep."*

And so we proclaim: truly Jesus died; and truly Jesus rose again from the dead. Which brings us finally again to the why—we talked on Friday about the "why" of the cross. Today, it's the "why" of resurrection. And the why is so we might believe that Jesus is, as the centurion admitted and as Jesus Himself claimed, truly the Son of God. It's so we might believe that what Jesus did on the cross, therefore, truly was a sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the world, and therefore that our sins are forgiven. It's so that we might believe that by His death, He destroyed death, and by His resurrection, He has opened heaven to us and everlasting, resurrected life.

Today we walked along with the women on that first Easter morn. We heard their eyewitness testimony and their report of the angel's proclamation. That's enough reasonably to say: this unusual event is historical. But mere historical knowledge doesn't save—faith does. Truly all this has been proclaimed for your faith — for faith does not come by our seeing, but by our hearing. All this has been proclaimed to strengthen your faith in Jesus, your confession that Jesus is Lord, your trust that God raised Him from the dead, for you and for your salvation.

Now let us step beyond our role as audience or even observers; let us now become participants. Come and let us eat and drink the fruit of His passion, Jesus' living body and blood, that our faith may be strengthened yet more. Come. Let us taste and see the goodness of the Lord, for

Christ is risen. Alleluia. He is risen, indeed. Alleluia. Alleluia.