In the name of ✠ Jesus. Amen.

A common theme in science fiction shows is time travel, and you surely know that the time traveler must be careful not to change things in the past, for changes in the past affect the future. Time is linear, we hear, always moving from yesterday to today to tomorrow, and so, if one could move back in time (like in the movie *Back to the Future*, if you recall) changes in the past could affect the future, but things that happen in the present don't affect the past.

If you accept that premise (and the reasoning is sound), then I think you would agree with me: nothing that we do or say today can affect the reason that we are gathered together on this day. We are gathered to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord, for St. Paul says, *"in fact Christ has been raised from the dead."* Jesus' resurrection is fact. Be gone, therefore, with those pseudo-scholars who call the resurrection *"ahistorical by definition."* Those are just academic snobs trying to deceive you with their supposed intellectual sophistication. But they're cowards who won't just come out and say what they think in plain language — that the resurrection didn't happen. It's made up. That's what they think — to which I say to them, *"You're the fools. You won't consider the evidence before your eyes."*

The resurrection most assuredly did happen. Jesus did rise from the dead. And all four Evangelists, who all record Jesus' passion and death, also record His resurrection, albeit in their own words with different nuances, different details. These differences, though, far from causing doubt about the truthfulness of the accounts, demonstrate the authenticity of the writers according to experts in evidence gathering. And I know that some forensic experts are calling into question eyewitness testimony these days, but I don't think that applies to Jesus' resurrection appearances. That would take not just one person, or two, or even twelve to mistakenly identify Jesus as risen from the dead, but even 500 all at one time. That's hard to believe.

And the difference in details can be reconciled. In the two resurrection accounts we've heard this morning, for example (from John earlier at the sunrise matins and from Luke here at this service), the accounts can be merged into one coherent whole without contradiction. In our Gospel from Luke, for example, we hear about the women who go to the tomb early on Sunday morning to care for Jesus' hastily prepared corpse. In John, we just hear about Mary Magdalene, without mention of the other women. But that's no contradiction; John does not say the other women weren't there; he just doesn't mention them. Moreover, John tells us that, upon seeing the stone rolled away, Mary ran to tell the disciples about it. Luke tells us that the other women went in and found Jesus' body missing. They also heard the proclamation of the two angels in dazzling apparel. They, too, ran to

tell the disciples the news, and Luke now tells us who reported to the disciples: it included Mary Magdalene, who ran to tell them without looking in, and the other women: *"Joanna and Mary the mother of James and … other women."* So, again no contradiction; just different details. On the other hand, what are the invariables? The tomb is empty; and the risen Jesus shows Himself to the disciples (we didn't hear it in Luke, but it does happen a bit later in his Gospel).

So, *"in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead."* It's why we're here today. Easter is a celebration of the living Jesus, who slumbered three days in death. But Easter morn, He was not there in the tomb, for He had risen, and there's nothing that we can do now to change that fact.

On the other hand, I readily confess that the events going on in my life can change how I experience Easter: sometimes with more intensity and sometimes with less. It is precisely when I am walking with a brother or sister in Christ (including his or her family) through the valley of the shadow of death that the resurrection of Jesus is the most meaningful to me, for this message that Jesus is risen from the dead has eternal consequences for us.

The fact that Jesus *"has been raised from the dead"* means that He is *"the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep,"* that is, who have died or are in the process of dying. It is comforting to know that even though we must die—at least most of us will, for we are Adam's progeny, born in his image of mortality; we die—yet, *"in Christ shall all be made alive,"* made immortal and imperishable at the last trumpet. In the midst of the grief and tears, it gives comfort and joy to know that your loved one will be experiencing the *"best Easter ever"* as they follow after Christ to the room especially prepared for him or her in the Father's house. Easter doesn't mean that we Christians do not grieve. It means that we don't have to *"grieve as others do who have no hope."* We have hope, *"[f]or since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep."*

And there you hear it; our hope lies not just in resurrection, as if there could be resurrection without cross. Indeed, just as there is nothing that we can do now to take away from the reality or significance of the resurrection, so there is nothing about the resurrection of Christ that takes away from the reality and significance of the cross of Christ. The resurrection does not make the message of the cross into Friday's irrelevant news, as though, now that the resurrection has happened we can forget about the cross and stop talking about the cross. It is precisely the opposite. The resurrection in fact illuminates the significance of the cross.

For without the resurrection, then the cross is just another dark episode in human malice and corruption. And for us who preach Christ and faith and

forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation, that all becomes worthless, if Christ is not raised from the dead. For then all you have is a dead Christ and a baseless faith. Then you are still in your sins, and when you die, you will most assuredly perish eternally.

But with Christ's resurrection, the cross has meaning. Jesus is truly God's Son, the all-sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the world. Christ's resurrection means that your salvation is not just an abstraction, but has found its concrete reality in God who became fully human, truly died, and opened the way to Paradise again. Christ's resurrection shows us that God has not lost control, but that everything happens according to His foreknowledge and plan. Thus, the angels proclaimed both cross and resurrection to the women, saying, *"Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen."* And they reminded the women that Jesus had foretold it all: *"Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise."*

Indeed, no, the resurrection has not superseded the cross in the life of the church, for resurrection and cross go together like a hand in a glove. Without death there could be no resurrection from the dead. And without the resurrection, Jesus' death would be nothing but a tragedy. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. We are Easter people, living in the joy of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, boasting still in the cross of Christ and proclaiming this word of the cross to a world in need of saving.

God grant you this Easter joy when the day comes for you to walk through the valley of the shadow of death. For remember, for us who look to Christ and follow Christ, like Christ, resurrection follows death. *"In fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."*

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.