

St Paul's Lutheran Church (Latimer, IA)
The Resurrection of Our Lord – March 31, 2024
Mark 16:1-8 – Do Not Be Alarmed
Rev Peter Wagner

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

But how do you know? Have you seen him? Can you prove that Christ is risen?

What a fearful question, for such a joyous day. Pause and consider. Our whole faith hangs on this fact, that Christ is risen. It's the central fact of Christianity. But how can we be sure?

What if it's not true? What if it's all a fairytale? If Christ has not been raised, says Saint Paul, then our faith is in vain and we are of all people the most to be pitied.

“If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.”

That is a frightening thought. And it is the same thought that filled the women with fear, at dawn on Easter morning. The women were astonished and seized with doubt, when they saw that the body of their Lord was gone. “And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back – it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed.”

But what did the angel say? “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 his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.”

“Do not be alarmed!” The angel says to you. Do not be alarmed. Cast your fear and doubt aside. Do not fear that your faith might be in vain, that the resurrection might not be true. Throw these doubts away, like your Lord casting aside his graveclothes.

For your Lord is alive, never to be taken away.

Therefore the angel gave the women three unshakable reasons to believe. Three reasons which are the foundation of our faith, the proof that he is risen, living and reigning to all eternity.

First reason. The angel said, “He is not here. See the place where they laid him!” His body is gone, everyone agrees. Although his body was guarded by the soldiers, although they were stationed to keep anyone from stealing it, yet the soldiers failed. Unless you believe the lie that they fell asleep and his disciples came and took him, there is no other explanation. He must have risen. The stone was large, the soldiers were vigilant. But somehow his body is gone. Let anyone produce a body, and we will renounce our faith. But in two thousand years, no corpse has ever been found. None will ever be found, because Christ is alive.

Second reason. The angel said, “He has risen, just as he told you.” He told you himself again and again, that he must suffer and die and be raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures. “See, we are going up to Jerusalem,” he said, “And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.” Are the words of Jesus not trustworthy? Have his words ever failed? When he spoke to the sick and blind and paralyzed, were they not healed? When he commanded the demons, did they not come out? As for his death, he foretold every detail. He told you beforehand that he would be mocked and spit upon and flogged and crucified, and it all came true. So shouldn't you also believe what he said, “After three days I will rise?”

His own testimony, all by itself, ought to be enough. But his testimony does not stand alone. His word is in accord with all the testimony of Scripture. To him all the prophets bear witness. Psalm 16:10 declares, “You will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.” And Isaiah 53:10 echoes back, “When his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days.”

Third reason. The angel said, “He is going to Galilee. There you and his disciples and Peter will see him.” And there they did see him. Over the next forty days, the disciples and more than five hundred brothers all saw him, and they believed. And when they saw him, their fear evaporated. They were filled with courage. They traveled to the ends of the earth, boldly proclaiming his resurrection. Even though they suffered cursing and stoning and martyrdom, even though they were beheaded and impaled and crucified upside down, they never wavered. They confessed with courage and confidence, even unto death, that what they saw was true. Christ is

risen, they had no doubt. And no torture or death could ever persuade them otherwise.

Therefore, for these three reasons, said the angel, do not be alarmed. Do not be alarmed, because his body is gone. "See where they laid him, he is not here!" Do not be alarmed, because he told you he would rise today, on the third day. And do not be alarmed, because he was seen by many eyewitnesses, eyewitnesses who endured the ultimate cross examination.

Rejoice! Cast aside all doubt! Your faith is not in vain. Do not be afraid, not even to ask these questions, to ask for proof. Because the answer is sure. The proof is indisputable. His body is gone. His own words and the words of Scripture are reliable. And the eyewitnesses who saw him testified courageously, even by their death.

Christ is living! Of that you can be sure. And this fact changes everything. It means that if you put your faith in him, you will also rise with him. So believe in him, and live. Live like the faithful eyewitnesses, who sacrificed everything for the truth of the gospel. Sacrifice everything, even your life, for the truth of the living Savior. Seek his word day by day. Seek his church and his forgiveness offered here. Seek his face, and his love, and his lifegiving body and blood. For he is living. And when he returns on the Last Day, he will raise all the dead, and give eternal life to all who believe in him.

Finally, saints of God, since there is no doubt, since Christ has been raised and your faith is not in vain, do not be alarmed. Do not fear death. Do not grieve as those who have no hope. Trust in him, seek his forgiveness, and confidently await his glorious resurrection.

Death and hell, you are vanquished! Do your worst, you have no claim on me. My Lord is risen, he is alive. His victory is forever. Amen.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia. Amen.