

Easter Festival Exordium and Sermon
Mark 16:1–8
by Peter Bockoven

The Exordium

- I. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!
- II. Those three short words: “Christ is Risen!” contain the reason for our faith and hope. The reason why we are gathered here this morning to worship Christ. The reason why we rejoice and are joyful this morning. Christ is risen! Our Lord and Savior was crucified for our sins. He was buried in the tomb. To the natural way of seeing things, it looked as if he lost the battle. But he had not: he had obtained the victory. And for that reason, he stayed in the tomb only until the third day.
- III. Christ is risen! His body came alive again. He left his tomb and showed himself to his disciples. He emerged from his battle in total victory, triumphant God and man, for us. Our sins that pain our conscience? He paid for them! And he rose to life, showing they have no more power to condemn us. Death? He defeated it! He went through it, and broke its jaws, when he burst forth to life again. The Devil? He confounded him! Because by his death and resurrection, he has reconciled humanity to the Father again. He has reversed the Devil’s work and has dethroned him and his power.
- IV. Christ is risen for us! And he has defeated our enemies. Is there any more joyful message? Is there any day more glorious than this? Let us now praise and glorify him, who hears us, as we join our voices together, in our Exordium Hymn.

The Text

When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. **2** And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. **3** And they were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” **4** And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. **5** And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. **6** And he said to them, “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. **7** 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.” **8** And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

The Sermon

“Jesus Rose For You: Do Not Be Alarmed!”

- I. In our Gospel, we read about some of the first people who came to witness the resurrection of Jesus. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome come to anoint Jesus’

body with spices. But when they arrived at the tomb, they were greatly surprised: the stone was rolled away, there was a man, an angel, sitting on the place where Jesus' body was supposed to be. The angel announces to them that Jesus has risen from the dead: and he encourages them not to be alarmed, not to be afraid or troubled.

- II. This is a common pattern throughout the Gospels. Christ shows his disciples some glimpse of his power or glory: his disciples become afraid: and then he encourages his disciples not to be. Remember when Jesus first called some of his disciples. Peter, James, and John were fishing, with no success: Christ comes and tells them to lay their net on the other side of the boat. They listen and catch a great amount. Then Peter falls down on his face, and tells Jesus to depart from him, because he's a sinful man: to which Jesus responds, "do not be afraid."
- III. Think also of the transfiguration of Jesus, again when he was with Peter, James, and John. They see his glory as God's Son: they hear the Father's voice from heaven: and they become terrified. But then Jesus comes, stoops down to them, and tells them not to be afraid.
- IV. Jesus was teaching his disciples, and all of us through the Gospels, that this is his special work: he drives out fear. He takes away our alarm. he gives our hearts and our consciences peace and joy. He does this ultimately, through the message of Easter. Every instance of Jesus driving away fear in the Gospels, was building up to that great event, the ultimate reason why Jesus encourages all of us, by his grace, to not be afraid. This is the great message of Easter: "Jesus Rose for You! Do not be alarmed!" This is what our Lord Jesus constantly preaches to us, through this message of Easter: to not be afraid, but to be joyful and glad.
- V. But why does Easter encourage us to not be alarmed? How is it, that it can drive away our fear? Does it tell us not to be afraid, because it's wrong to be afraid? Does it tell us not to be afraid, "Just because?" Does it just zap our souls with a happy feeling? No: instead, it tells us to not be afraid, because the message of Easter directly stands up to, directly addresses, those things that cause our fear in the first place. It stands up to them, and defeats them, for us.
- VI. The things that cause our fear in the first place, can ultimately be connected to one of four things. At the end of the day, our natural fear, or alarm, boils down to: 1) Fear about knowledge. 2) Fear about the conscience. 3) Fear about mortality. And 4) Fear about this present life.
- VII. What is the alarm about knowledge? Alarm over wanting to know the truth about the universe. The truth about existence. The point of this present experience how it all came here. The direction that all of human history is going toward. What force is ultimately controlling the universe. It's an alarm, ultimately, about needing to know the ultimate truth: to know who God is.
- VIII. And what is the alarm of the conscience? The pain and fear we feel, on account of our imperfection and corruption. We know, in part, how we should be, and what we should do: and we know, in part, that we do not live up to it. We have caused pain in our own life, and in the lives of others.

- IX. And as for the alarm of our mortality: Who knows when death will come to us? Enough said
- X. And the alarm for our present life: where do we find strength to live in the right way? In this world, which troubles us so greatly? What is there in the world that can ultimately and continually motivate us, despite what may happen in life?
- XI. By his resurrection, Jesus addresses and conquers all these fears. Who is God? What is his name? How can we know him? What is the ultimate truth of the universe, and who is in control of it all? Christ shows us. He rose from the dead! And only one with infinite power could do that. Christ rose from the dead! And so there is no doubt that he is the Son of God: He is the Son of God who has showed us the true God: himself, with his Father, and the Holy Spirit. So Paul writes, Romans 1: “Jesus Christ was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead.”
- XII. And as for the fear of the conscience? For fear of sin and its punishment? By his resurrection, Jesus has shown that God has accepted his payment for sin. If Jesus had not risen from the dead, that would have meant that his sacrifice did not sufficiently pay for the world’s sins. That means God would still be angry with us. That’s why St. Paul writes, 1 Corinthians 15: “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.” But this is what the resurrection tells us: *Since Christ has been raised, our faith is not futile; we are no longer in our sins.* Therefore St. Paul writes, Romans 4: “Christ was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.” By Jesus’ resurrection, God has declared this to be true: our sins are paid for. They are removed. They are pardoned.
- XIII. And as for the fear of death? Jesus says, John 14: “Because I live, you also will live.” And St. Paul writes, 1 Corinthians 15: “In fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.” Christ is the first one to rise from the dead: so we see he has power over death itself. He will return, and raise up all the dead: and his believers he will raise up to eternal life with him. By this we know that death is only temporary! And by this faith, we are able to endure death: knowing that our Lord will raise up our mortal bodies to live with him forever.
- XIV. And as for the fear of this life? How do we find motivation to live? Look to the resurrection of Jesus! It gives you new life with God! It gives you the power to forsake sin and have a new life of faith! Because by his resurrection, and by your being connected to his death and resurrection through baptism, God has worked a new life in you. Just as Christ died and was raised to new life: so also you die and are raised to new life, through the waters of baptism by faith. So Paul writes, Romans 6: “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be unite with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.” We’ve died with Christ. We’ve died to sin and its power. And we’ve been raised together with him to life.

XV. This is the joy of Easter! This is why we are here. This is why we worship and glorify Christ. This is why he encourages all of us, by the message of his resurrection, to not be alarmed, or afraid. In the resurrection, we know the true God again: we know that our sins are completely forgiven and paid for: we know that we also will rise to eternal life, body and soul, with Christ: and until then, we have the power to live in this present life, dead to sin, alive to righteousness. Thanks be to our risen and victorious Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! Amen.