

Leading up to the worship of the Golden Calf, we read this: "When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people ... said to [Aaron], 'Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up ...out of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.'" Aaron complied; made an image declaring it was the God that had delivered them. They attempted to worship the true God on their own terms in a most vile way – intoxication and fornication.

Jesus led His disciples out of bondage to sin and death and in the process of securing this for them we hear from the two on the road to Emmaus later on Easter the despondent message: "Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but Him they did not see."

When sinners do not believe in the true unseen God of deliverance, the only option is idolatry which brings death everlasting. But you are here today because you believe that God has delivered you through His crucified and resurrected Son, your holy and complete Substitute. As Jesus said to Thomas: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Or as Paul later writes: "We live by faith, not by sight."

We are not left to search for a missing god, God has come. He lived and died, but what is more He has been raised from the dead, never to die again. Moses eventually came down Mt. Sinai and saw the idolatry of God's people and he was furious. Jesus appeared outside His tomb alive granting peace and life to all who believe, slow to believe as they were. But you have been quickened without seeing to believe in this your blessing, please rise and sing #348.

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. 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." And they remembered His words, and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest.

O risen Christ, who said, "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed": Mercifully grant that this benediction may be ours; so that, walking by faith and not by sight, we may evermore rejoice in You, and confess You as our Savior, our Lord, and our God. Amen. (Parish Prayers, ed. Frank Colquhoun, p. 86)

In Christ Jesus, who went from death to life, so that we too may pass from death to life for His name's sake, dear fellow redeemed:

The Apostles' response to the women's report was: "these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them." But immediately after hearing it, Peter and John ran to the tomb and found it empty just as they had reported. But what is more, they found the grave clothes neatly folded, giving evidence that this was not an act of some frantic graverobbers. Probably most of your neighbors, even some closely related to you find the account of Jesus' resurrection to be an idle tale. With that in mind and for your comfort today consider with me **Easter's Ferry Tale: Transporting You from Death to Life.** That is F-E-R-R-Y not F-A-I-R-Y. The latter fairy tales are fanciful fictional stories with often a pretend happily-ever-after ending. The Easter tale or account is a truthful narrative which powerfully gives life and immortality, ferrying the sinner from death to life. Its power is active for us even to this day. The Lord is risen! (C: *He is risen indeed! Allelujah!*) See? - how active it is among you!

I

Imagine being in these women shoes. They loved the Lord Jesus, but they were in part eye and ear witnesses to what all transpired on Friday. They along with the Apostles heard Jesus tell them as the angels reminded them: "that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise." So despondent were they, they did not come expecting the tomb to be empty on that third day. They came bearing spices to finish the hasty job of burial done on Friday wondering about who would roll the large stone away.

Have you ever been so despondent you forgot about the promises of your Lord to you? It is easy for us sinners to do. We can so easily become weighed down with the difficulties of life and lose sight that the real Easter ferry-tale promises an actual happily-ever-after ending for us. Have you been overwhelmed with grief, losing someone so important in your life? Have you been sorely affected by a loved one whose life is crashing down before you and threatening to take you down as well? Have you ever been so maligned by those who hate you, that those who befriend you and express their love for you begin to have doubts about you?

We are told the women remembered the words and promises of Jesus which included the promise of resurrection, but it all seemed too good to be true. Their recounting of all that they experienced, including even as Matthew informs us Jesus' appearing to them on their way back into Jerusalem, seemed like an idle tale to the disciples. While the women probably reported it with faith in their hearts that Jesus lives, there was still fear in regard to all that it meant even for them.

II

Some of you may remember the blockbuster hit movie from 1965: *"The Greatest Story Ever Told"*. It was based on a radio program by that name in the 1940s followed by a book. No doubt there were some very moving portrayals of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, but how much of reporting the facts was accompanied with the declaration of life and salvation? If it was typical Hollywood style very little of the Gospel was actually proclaimed. Many Christians probably supplied Gospel declarations subliminally. So, was it really just a F-A-I-R-Y tale like the disciples thought they heard from the women?

My fellow Easter festival worshippers of the risen Lord Jesus, the greatest story ever told is for you to know AND trust. It actually transports you from death to life. This Jesus of Nazareth is the Holy Son of God made flesh, who came to take your place as sinner, to suffer and die in your place, to receive the eternal condemnation for you, so that in rising again He now lives to give you life right here and now.

Jesus' common greeting in His Easter appearances was "Peace be with you!" or "Do not be afraid," which amounts to the same. Have you ever noticed how liberally the message of "Peace be with you." is found throughout our divine service liturgy? The fear experienced by these weak believers was much more than *"Are we seeing a ghost?"* The fear is associated with their lack of faith, their sin of unbelief. "Peace be with you!" is really Jesus saying this *"I live, despite dying for you, I live! Your sin which was laid on Me to make payment for all your sin is gone; it died with Me. I rise to live without your sin, therefore your sin is removed, no longer left to condemn you and you now live through and with Me."*

It is this very proclamation that transports you from your guilt, shame and condemnation on account of your sin, being filled with death to being forgiven, redeemed and justified before God your Creator possessing life now and forever for Jesus' sake. You are ferried from death to life. So today, as you consider the factual narrative of Jesus' resurrection, consider it more than just *the greatest story ever told*, which of course it is. It is the pronouncement that you have been set free from your sin and deserved death. The Spirit works in you giving you life in Jesus' name.

It is like when God said in creation: "Let there be light!" – there was light. So when the pastor speaks the absolution to you "Your sins are forgiven." – sins are actually forgiven. The Lord commanded him to speak and it is as He says it is. When you receive Jesus' very body given and blood shed for the forgiveness of sins, there you receive life and salvation.

When Moses came down from Mt. Sinai, it was not that he alone was furious, God, the true deliverer of Israel from Egypt, found the unbelief and idolatrous worship practices to be offensive, an abomination. But

when the risen Lord Jesus appeared amidst the many doubts and fears of the disciples, He said: "*Peace be with you!*" What a relief for them to hear. So, it is with you today my fellow redeemed. Since you first believed in Jesus you have continued to sin. You have been pressed by the many difficulties of life which have caused you at times to question God's love for you despite His many promises to you. And yet you hear again and again the word of peace – your sins are all forgiven, even your many sins of doubt and despair.

This is the F-E-R-R-Y-tale that is at work for you once again this morning. You are truly transported from death to life. Hearing the story of Jesus' resurrection to life is not just information, but transportation. What God has done for you in His Son, whom He sacrificed for you and raised again for you, bespeaks you alive. Living happily-ever-after, happens right here and now. In fact, for most of you it started in infancy when you were born again given new life in Jesus. Receive *the greatest story ever told* as it is meant to be, a story that bestows life to you. Live now as though you will never die, even though you die. The Lord is risen! (C: *He is risen indeed! Allelujah!*) That is how real it is in you, "Peace be with you!" Amen.