



Grace Lutheran Church, State College, PA

Rev. Scott E. Schul

Easter Sunday – April 4, 2021

Sermon Title: “Love and the Risen Christ”

Gospel Text: Mark 16:1-8

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Jesus Christ is the centerpiece of our Easter celebration, and the reality of his resurrection is at the absolute core of our faith and identity as Christians. The empty tomb on that first Easter Sunday literally changed *everything*.

But Jesus has not called us here to merely remember what happened *then*. He challenges us to consider what his life, death, and resurrection mean to us *today*. In Christ’s rising we have forgiveness, salvation, and the promise of *eternal life*. But does Easter only impact what happens when we *die*? Or should Easter also make a difference in how we *live*?

Three courageous women in today’s Gospel will help us answer that question. Mary Magdalene became one of Jesus’s most devoted followers after he healed her. The other Mary was Jesus’s mother, and I think we all know how much she loved Jesus. The third woman in today’s Gospel is Salome. We know only that she was a follower of Jesus, which in that day and age of persecution was more than enough to establish her courage.

These three women had experienced so many traumatic things over the preceding days. *They were there* when Jesus was brutally crucified. *They were there* when Jesus’s lifeless body was placed in the tomb. And now *they were back*, to honor his body by anointing it. I doubt *anything* could’ve kept those women from their task that day. They were not afraid of the Roman soldiers. They were not afraid of being arrested and beaten. They were not afraid to die. Even though they had suffered the death of a loved one, the death of a cause, and probably even the death of hope itself, as they approached that tomb, *they were not afraid*.

Yet by the end of today’s Gospel, we see these three incredibly courageous women stunned into silence and fleeing from the tomb in terror and amazement. What possibly could have provoked such a change? We of course know the story; they were silenced and scared by an empty tomb, and the messenger’s news that Jesus was indeed *exactly* who he said he was, and had done *exactly* what he promised he would do. He had risen from the dead, and was now on the move, heading north to Galilee.

Does it seem odd to you that these remarkable women could bravely withstand so much intimidation, hardship, and sadness, but then run in mute terror at news of Christ’s rising, something that would seem to be very Good News? Well, before we rush to judge those women, let us consider our own lives. Have there been times when the reality of a resurrected Jesus has scared *us*? Have there been times when we’ve perceived a *risen* Jesus, on the move in *our lives*

and in *our world*, as more of a threat than a dead Jesus? After all, a *dead* Jesus demands very little of us. But a *risen* Jesus? That changes everything.

Friends, Jesus loves you as you are. But in his victory over sin and death he invites you to a new way of living and being that will bring true joy, peace, wholeness, and holiness to your life and, through you, to our world. The risen Jesus empowers you to stop chasing *the world's* empty dreams and instead embrace *God's* grace-filled dream, now and for eternity. The risen Jesus invites you to be vulnerable, to trust, and to be transformed.

Change like that can be scary and uncomfortable. The temptation is strong in us to hold onto what we *know*, with all of its self-evident flaws, and not risk the possibility of *what might be* in Jesus Christ. The same was true for those three women that first Easter morning, as well as for all of Jesus's disciples, who had denied Jesus and abandoned his side for the supposed safety and security of a locked room.

But even though they had given up on Jesus, Jesus *never* gave up on them. That's why the messenger in the empty tomb went out of his way to instruct the women to inform the disciples, AND Peter, the one who had most spectacularly failed Jesus – that Christ was risen and that they would see him. Have you likewise wandered from Jesus? Jesus knows you inside and out. He has seen you at your very worst. But despite that, Jesus hasn't given up on *you*, and today he reaffirms what he proclaimed at your baptism: *I love you, I claim you, and I will never, ever let you go.*

We know the rest of the story. The three women at the empty tomb overcame their fears and became the first preachers of the Good News that Jesus is risen. How did they do it? *Love*. That's the overriding message of scripture. *Love* is what brought Jesus into this world. *Love* is what enabled Jesus to bear the cross. *Love* is what conquered sin and death. And *love* is what enabled those women to cast aside their fears and share the news that would change everything. *Love* likewise will get us through this pandemic. And *love* will enable *us* to put aside *our* fears, be transformed by Jesus, and share his Good News with a world in desperate need of hope. *In the end, the love of Christ conquers all.* May that very love fill you this Easter day. *Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*