

Mark 16:1-8 (The Resurrection of Our Lord: Easter Day—Series B)

“That Will Never Change”

Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield CT

April 4, 2021

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹ 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 last time we saw Peter in the Gospel of Mark was extremely late Thursday evening or sometime in the darkness after midnight on Friday. A rooster crowed a second time. “And Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, ‘Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.’ And he broke down and wept” (Mark 14:72 ESV).

The apostle Paul called himself “the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle” (1 Cor 15:9). He felt that way because he had formerly persecuted the Church of Christ. But how “least” and “unworthy” must Peter have felt? Peter denied knowing Jesus, “I do not know the man!” And to make matters worse for Peter, Luke records that “the Lord turned and looked at Peter” (22:61). What was in that look? Sorrow, disappointment, a look of “This is what I told you was going to happen, but you didn’t believe me.” Peter was the man who emphatically told His Lord and Master, “Even though they all fall away, I will not. . . . If I must die with you, I will not deny you” (Mark 14:29-30). But as Jesus rightly said in Gethsemane, “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

I wonder if Peter felt so guilty and so devastated by His denial that he believed he was no longer worthy of being a disciple, a follower of Jesus. After all, he was one of the Twelve! He was a part of Jesus' inner circle with James and John. These three were all together when the Lord raised Jairus' daughter. Peter, James, and John were with Jesus together on the Mount of Transfiguration. They were together with Him in Gethsemane. Perhaps Peter considered those days over. Jesus was dead and in the grave. He had denied the One whom he confessed to be the Christ, the Son of God. How would the others ever welcome him back, even if Jesus were still alive?

Do you ever wonder that about yourself? After you've sinned and done what the Lord has commanded you not to do, do you feel overwhelmed by the guilt and despair? Perhaps you joined the crowd in mocking another believer because you didn't want to be seen as different. Or when you had the opportunity to acknowledge your faith in public and you failed because you were scared of how people will react, do you wonder if the Lord and His Church will welcome you back? You, like Peter, have denied the One who is the Christ, the Son of God, without even realizing you've done it. And when you see your sins and your failures to always fear and love God and all the moments you did not love other people with a sacrificial love, the guilt can be overwhelming. When you see all the times you failed to do the good that God commands and instead have done the evil He forbids, it may be hard to even step into the church, knowing what a hypocrite you have been. I bet Peter felt just like that too.

But Easter changes all these things for Peter and for you. Did you notice that interesting little addition in the angel's announcement to the women? I want to give credit to Pastor Kevin Mongeau for highlighting it for me in our conversation last week. The angel said,

“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.” Here Jesus clearly wants the message to be relayed to Peter that their relationship has not been broken, even though Peter denied knowing Him.

The Good News is that, on the cross, Jesus suffered and died to pay for Peter’s sin of denial. He bled and died to pay the price for your denials, your lack of confessing Him to be Lord and Savior, indeed, for every single one of your sins against God and neighbor. All of your failures to love God and others has been covered in the precious blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ. Where we, along with Peter, are unfaithful, Jesus is always faithful. 2 Timothy 2:13, “If we are unfaithful, [Jesus] remains faithful—for he is not able deny himself.”

Our Triune God is faithful to His Word and Promise: “the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7 ESV). God’s Word does what it promises, even to us who daily sin much, deny our Lord, and turn away from Him time and again. Nevertheless, His blood cleanses. He is faithful! The death of Jesus on the cross was for your salvation from sin. Jesus won your forgiveness. That will never change. Jesus rescued you from death and hell. That will never change. In Christ, you “have an advocate with the Father” (1 John 2:1), One who is perfectly righteous. You have an advocate who lived a perfect life and then turned around and offered His own righteousness to you and took your sins in return. He has clothed you with pure garments in return for your own filthy garments stained with lies, denials, hatred, gossip, immorality, and evil. Through Baptism, Christ has wrapped you up in the robe of His own righteousness, which covers all your sin. That will never change.

It didn't change for Peter. He saw the Risen Lord Jesus when He was with the Eleven in the Upper Room on that first Easter evening. Later, Jesus made breakfast of bread and fish on a charcoal grill on the beach of the Sea of Galilee. After breakfast, the Risen Savior asked Peter three times, "Do you love Me?" And Peter responded affirmatively every time, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." And Jesus replied, "Then you've got work to do. Feed My Lambs. Tend My flock. Feed My sheep." Peter was still a disciple, a forgiven sinner. Jesus was faithful and went to the cross and the grave and dealt with the denial. He took it to the cross along with all the other sins you've committed, along with all the sins I've committed, along with the sins of the whole world.

Now, nothing remains of your sins or mine. The blood of Jesus was shed on the cross to atone for our sins and the sins of the whole world. Forgiveness belongs to you because of the saving work of Jesus Christ. And He gives you that forgiveness through the Gospel Word of Absolution, in Holy Baptism, and in the Lord's Supper. Jesus is faithful. He calls you to Himself over and over again, calling you in repentance and faith to receive the fruits of His cross and resurrection—forgiveness, eternal life, and salvation from sin, death, and hell.

And that's not going to change. Jesus has taken away your guilt. As I have the joy to tell you over and over, there is nothing that you can do that will make Jesus love you any less. The proof is in His hands and feet, marked even now with the prints of the nails, His side marked with the scar of the spear—He is forever the Crucified One. And He is forever the Risen One. Death is defeated. Forgiveness of sins and everlasting life is yours in His name, the blessed Name of Jesus. And that will never change. Amen.