

THERE WAS A TOMB. IT WAS EMPTY FOR CHRIST IS RISEN!

He is risen!

Hear again the Word of God for this Dawn remembrance of the Resurrection of our Lord:

But now Christ, has been raised from (the) dead, (is) first-fruit of the ones having fallen asleep. For, since through man death (came); also through man (comes the) resurrection of the dead.¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Last Sunday, from this pulpit in the Lord's services, many of you heard that Holy Week is a week of fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. Those who attended the services throughout the week just ended heard many texts declare the coming Christ and discovered anew their completion in Jesus. All of that anticipation through the Old Testament texts culminated last evening in the Resurrection Vigil. The congregation which God assembled twelve hours ago left in silence and semi-darkness after hearing the Gospel reading end with words like these:

Then going out, they fled from the tomb, for they had trembling and bewilderment; and to no one nothing they said, for they feared!"²

Yesterday morning, in finishing emails around 7:00 AM, a story popped up on Yahoo. It was a teaser from an article allegedly written in the online news source, "The Blaze." The gist of the report is that the author of another piece was questioning the very existence of the tomb in which Jesus lay. It went on to intimate that the bodily

¹ I Corinthians 15:20-21.

² Mark 16:8.

resurrection was unimportant, and that a spiritual resurrection of Jesus was more probable. It was going to be quoted now.

However, when it was looked for later in the day, all evidence of the article, on either Yahoo or “The Blaze” was gone! Maybe it is back now. Do not trouble yourself looking for it, for the Word of God declares:

This first all of you continue knowing, that they will come in the last days, scoffing, mocking ones, according to their own lusts continually walking.³

Those who have a “problem” with miracles, with the death of Jesus, and His bodily resurrection have been with the Church since the first Resurrection Dawn. According to St. Matthew’s inspired record, the chief priests and elders of the Jews, when faced with the resurrection, bought off the soldiers who had been guarding the tomb which had become empty. They agreed to say:

The disciples of Him, by night having come, they stole Him from us while we were sleeping.⁴

It seems the religious authorities bribed the guards with enough coinage to have them testify to dereliction of duty! In our armed services, that can be a court-martial offense. In the Roman armies, it could have resulted in execution or whipping. Further, if the guards were sleeping, the most they could do was guess that the disciples stole the Body. It would have been a heavy sleep too, for other texts tell us the stone was large. Surely, if one is going to deny the miracle of the resurrection, one could not posit a

³ *1 Peter 3:3.*

⁴ *Matthew 28:13*

miracle of a giant stone being rolled from the tomb without making enough noise to “wake the dead!”

In addition, there is a record of one to two tombs in or near a garden, where the ancients maintained Jesus’ body had lain. We have eyewitness reports that there was a tomb, from multiple sources. So, there was a tomb, and on resurrection morning, Jesus’ Body was not in it! There was a tomb. It was empty, for Christ is risen! That, then, brings us to the theme text for this morning:

But now Christ, has been raised from (the) dead, (is) first-fruit of the ones having fallen asleep. For, since through man death (came); also through man (comes the) resurrection of the dead.⁵

The text declares Jesus as the firstfruits. In the Old Covenant, God gave a commandment that bears directly on this day. It was Jewish practice that, on the first day of the week following the Passover, Sunday, the high priest was to present a grain offering in the Temple. It served as *a specimen sheaf – representative, pattern, and pledge of all the rest.*⁶ That public worship rite signified that there were more good fruits from the harvest yet to come. Hence, the firstfruits, by faith, indicated that there would be later fruits of the field.

The inerrant record of the multiple eye-witness testimonies of Jesus’ bodily resurrection from the tomb has stood the test of time. That Jesus was called the firstfruits means, for the faithful, that there would be more fruits from the dead. That He was raised from the dead means that you will be raised from the dead when Jesus comes

⁵ I Corinthians 15:20-21.

again. Really, of the Christ, the Church of the Old Testament had that witness long before that first Resurrection morning. Just taking the texts we had as the Propers (the daily changeable readings) for today, we hear of the victory of the Anointed One of God in the Psalms and from Isaiah. Hear three of them again, in the order they were proclaimed among us:

*The Lord reigns, in majesty He is robed;
YHWH; (in) strength has girded Himself;
He has established the inhabited world;
it shall not be shaken up.⁷*

*For You will not give up my soul to Sheol;
You will not give Your Holy One to see (the) Pit.⁸*

*He will swallow up death forever;
and Adonai will wipe away tears from upon all faces,
and (the) reproach of His people He will cause to take away from upon
the face of the earth.
For YHWH has spoken.⁹*

The God who rules in the attire of royalty must be, by definition of His rule, the Living God. His strength was shown when He bound the deceiver of mankind in His death on the cross, paid the price for your sins there, and satisfied the Father's wrath at sins and sinners. He Who, with the Father, created and established the inhabited world, keeps it as He lives. His power to keep it from destruction was shown as He kept His own Body from going the way of all mankind without Him, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

⁶Tan, P. L. 1996, c1979. *Encyclopedia of 7700 illustrations : [a treasury of illustrations, anecdotes, facts and quotations for pastors, teachers and Christian workers]*. Bible Communications: Garland TX

⁷ *Psalm* 93:1 MT, 92:1b LXX.

⁸ *Psalm* 16:10.

⁹ *Isaiah* 25:8.

You know that to be true because God the Father did not give the soul of the Son into the place of the dead. Oh, yes, Jesus, with His own bodily eyes, in His descent into the Pit, did behold Sheol. But, He saw it as the conquering King whose death had swallowed up death forever for those who continue to call upon Him. He declared His victory to the ones who had died, bound Satan, and on the first Resurrection morning was seen alive in the body first, according to St. John, by Mary. Our Gospel text affirms that eternal truth as we hear again of Jesus and Mary's first contact after the resurrection.

*Jesus says to her, "woman, why are you crying? Whom do you seek?"
Then, reckoning that the gardener He was, she said to him, "O Lord, if you carried Him away, say to me where you placed Him, and I will pick Him up."
He says to her, Jesus, "Mary!"
She turned about, saying to Him, in Hebrew, "Rabbonai!" (the one which means, 'Teacher!')"¹⁰*

Truly, that exchange teaches that, for the faithful, believing is seeing. Mary would have heard all the Psalms and Isaiah texts you heard this morning. She would have been exposed to them in the home, and in the Court of the Women. She knew the promises, as do you. Yet, without the gift of the Faith, she could not see Jesus even while she was looking at Him! It took Him calling her by name to recognize Him as raised from death and the tomb.

Just so has God in Christ called you by name. He did so when your name was joined with His in Holy Baptism. There, you were given the ability to call upon Jesus in the Faith as did Mary, "Teacher," and freed to see all the things He teaches from His Word. In that Word, which works in those who are baptized – for in Holy Baptism

God gives the Holy Spirit, in the Word of God, you too behold Jesus bodily raised from the dead. You are given His firstfruits – His Body and Blood for the forgiveness of all your sins and divine strengthening to life everlasting. That is all because the Word of God declares, and you have come to believe:

He has risen!

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Resurrection Dawn (*LSB* One-year series)

Psalm 93, Psalm 16; Isaiah 25:6-9; I Corinthians 15:12-25; John 20:1-18

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Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

Soli Deo Gloria

¹⁰ *John* 20: