

THE LORD IS RISEN, HE IS RISEN INDEED!

Sermon for Easter Sunday

Matthew 28:1-10

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is taken from Matthew 28:1-10, read before.

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Joy fills our hearts as we hear on Easter morning the familiar tidings of our Lord's resurrection and picture to ourselves the glorious scenes enacted on that morn. Happy is he who today rejoices in a risen Lord, a living Saviour, but unhappy is he to whom the message of the angel, "**He has risen**," is either plain untruth or just a beautiful illusion! Doubly unhappy is he who would celebrate Easter without faith in the resurrection!

With God's help, this morning, let us meditate on the glad Easter message that the Lord is risen, He is risen indeed!

Let us begin by acknowledging first of all that these words state a fact which is *certain*.

We confess the truth of Christ's resurrection in the Creeds, believing in the actual, physical, bodily resurrection of Christ. We maintain, moreover, that our Lord's resurrection is an *established, incontrovertible fact*.

Now, of course, there are those who will deny the resurrection. They will argue that in all their experience, no man has ever risen from the dead, and that it is impossible for a person who has really died to come back to life. But such arguments should not disturb us. We, too, could not have believed it if we had not been given the gift of faith by the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul writes how "*The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned*" (1 Cor. 2:14). This Spirit-given wisdom, including the faith to believe in the resurrection, makes no sense to a man of the world. Man, as he is by nature—physical, material, concerned about things of this world—cannot understand God's ways because natural man is unspiritual. The Spirit of God is not in him to enable him to understand. The contrast between the person who has the Spirit and the person who does not have Him in his heart is absolute. It's the difference between day and night, between life and death. But as Paul goes on to say, those with the Spirit have "*the mind of Christ*" (v. 16). When, in His divine wisdom, God the Father ordained that His Son should die and rise again, we believe.

Equally shallow is the argument that the witnesses of the resurrection contradict one another and, therefore, cannot have been divinely inspired but are unreliable.

While we admit there are differences among the four evangelists in their accounts of the resurrection, *this proves nothing against their reliability*, and none of them contradicts each other. On the contrary, these very differences prove the *sincerity* of the apostles and corroborate their claim of writing by divine inspiration; for the Holy Spirit led each one to write what *he had seen and heard*, and the four accounts supplement each other and give a fuller picture of the entire proceedings of that morning.

Instead of scrutinising every objection made against the fact of Christ's resurrection, let us directly address the core issue. What are the facts, as reported by the holy witnesses? Jesus had truly died — the spear thrust into His side had settled that — and He was laid to rest as the Jews customarily buried their

dead. Pilate had given in to the Jews' plea, who remembered Christ's prophecy that He would rise again, and had set a watch of Roman soldiers at the tomb, secured with the imperial seal. But, as we know, this was all in vain. Matthew tells us, "**There was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.** ³ **His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.** ⁴ **And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men.**" The angel then said to the women, "**Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified.** ⁶ **He is not here, for He has risen, as He said. Come, see the place where He lay.**" The tomb was empty! And it wasn't long before they soon saw, heard, and touched the risen Lord.

Later, the apostles and many other disciples saw the Lord and spoke with Him—not once, but many times. Paul writes how the risen Lord "*appeared to Peter, then to the twelve.* ⁶ *Then He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time,* ⁷ *Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles.* ⁸ *Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me*" (1 Cor. 15:5-8).

Moreover, it is evident that they truly believed in the resurrection because they boldly proclaimed it — even under the threat of death — to Jews and Gentiles as the central truth of the Gospel of Christ, and the Church grew, spread, and continues to declare its faith in the risen Saviour today.

Secondly, the Lord is risen indeed - this is also an *essential fact*.

Our religion, our faith, isn't something we have made up. It's not a figment of our imagination. We shouldn't see it just as one of life's decorations or as a rule we set to improve and complete our lives. If it were only that, then Christ's resurrection and Christ Himself might be overlooked. But our religion is so much more. On one side, there's the huge truth of man's sin, which is visible everywhere: in our conscience, in the Word of God, in the pain, sorrow, and death that have marred God's world for thousands of years.

There is, on the other hand, the righteous and holy God, the Giver of the Law, who has affixed to the Law His threat and curse against all who do not keep it. To bridge that gulf; to show to sinners the way of escape from the judgment threatening all transgressors; to restore sinful man to God's grace and favour; to lead the sinner back to God, to life, to heaven: this is the real purpose, the great object, of our Christian religion. We know the way to salvation taught by the Gospel of Christ who is the incarnate Son of God and who brought about a reconciliation when He, the Saviour of mankind, obediently fulfilled God's Law in perfect righteousness and received in His own person the punishment which the accumulated guilt of man had deserved.

From this, we see that the resurrection of Christ is vital to our faith and salvation. Everything hinges on our ability to say, "*The Lord is risen indeed.*" God took on the form of a servant; He became human. As a man, as a true Substitute for the human race, He lived, suffered, and died. Therefore, it was necessary for Him to rise again to complete and prove our salvation. It is true that Christ rose from the dead because He promised to do so; it is equally true that He promised to rise because it was necessary. To show that He not only took on our sins but also set us free from them; that He not only bore God's wrath but also extinguished it, winning love and grace for us; that He not only suffered our punishment but fully satisfied God's justice; that He not only died our death but secured life and eternal happiness for us; that He not only offered Himself as a ransom and sacrifice for our sins but that God accepted it and pardoned the sinners: for that to happen, *it was necessary that He should not only descend into the grave laden with our sins but also rise again, free from sin, as the Conqueror of all our enemies, crowned with honour and glory, and the firstfruits of those who sleep*. This was necessary, for, as St. Paul says, "*If Christ be not raised... your faith is in vain... you are still in your sins.*"

Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished" (1 Cor. 15:13-19 paraphrased). But now Christ is risen from the dead! The Lord is risen indeed! God be praised that we are confident in this vital fact, giving us a firm foundation for our belief and hope!

And this leads us to our final thought. The Lord is risen indeed: this is also a *joyful fact*.

We could spend hours this morning dwelling on this fact, but let's not. Instead, we may briefly indicate, guided by certain Scripture texts, the springs of pure, heavenly joy which the truth that the Lord is risen opens to every believing Christian.

The first is from our text: "**He has risen, as He said.**"

The resurrection of Christ is proof of His claims, of His doctrine, of His Gospel; it proves that He is God's Son, our Saviour, and that "*all the promises of God find their Yes in Him*" (1 Cor. 1:20).

Again, the Apostle Paul writes, "*Christ was delivered for our trespasses, and was raised again for our justification*" (Rom. 4:25). These words underscore the glorious importance of Christ's resurrection in the eyes of the Father. Christ's resurrection was the solemn justification of a world of sinners, a general pardon extended to all; and hence it leads to the joyful conviction that in God's judgment our sins were forgiven long ago, and that faith may at any time take this forgiveness and rest upon it.

Then there is the word of the risen Lord Himself: "*I am with you always, to the end of the world*" (Matt. 28:20).

The risen Lord is with us as He was with His disciples, keeping His Church of believers as the apple of His eye, attending His people with His grace, His protection, His blessing, and His faithfulness.

Another word from the Lord is "*Because I live, you also will live*" (John 14:19).

Of the heavenly, transfigured life that is His, we are to be partakers by faith and renewal of heart, until He will raise us on the Last Day, receive us into the mansions which He has prepared for us, and change our vile body and fashion it like unto His glorious body, so that soul and body may joy in His presence eternally. What pure, holy joy, then, if we can exclaim with Job in his tribulation, "*I know that my Redeemer lives!*" (19:25).

Lastly, Paul draws a practical lesson from the resurrection of Christ, which the Christian can hear only with joy: "*Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life*" (Rom. 6:4).

A Saviour who died and rose for us, who is with us always, who renews our life and fashions it like unto His, who prepares a place for us above and will raise us to glory, what a mighty power He is for remodelling our lives! His open grave teaches us to rise from sin; His resurrection gives us power to conquer sin and temptation; His living presence fills us with devotion and zeal in His cause.

Let us rise, then, triumphant over sin and sorrow in the joy that comes with the realisation that in Christ's resurrection there is fullness of salvation! Let this day and every succeeding day be to you a day of spiritual uprising! So the end of the resurrection will be accomplished in us: our faith will be renewed from day to day, our hope will become more firmly grounded, and our love will be quickened by our living Saviour. Let us keep the feast, then, with rejoicing and thanksgiving! The Lord is risen, He is risen indeed. Thanks be to God, therefore, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and mind in Christ Jesus. Amen.