

## Sermon for Morning Prayer Easter Sunday

### Lessons:

**The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the twenty-fifth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.

“O LORD, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth. For thou hast made of a city an heap; of a defenced city a ruin: a palace of strangers to be no city; it shall never be built. Therefore shall the strong people glorify thee, the city of the terrible nations shall fear thee. For thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall. Thou shalt bring down the noise of strangers, as the heat in a dry place; even the heat with the shadow of a cloud: the branch of the terrible ones shall be brought low.

“And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it.

“And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**The Second Lesson:** Here beginneth the twentyeighth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Matthew.

“In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: And for fear of him the keepers did shake,

and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you. And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word.

“And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

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“Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

### **Text:**

From the Second Lesson: “And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said.” In the Name of the Father, and of the † Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

### **Introduction:**

One Easter Sunday years ago, I drove into a small Southern town to celebrate the Easter Sunday Mass for a small congregation we had there. There were several church buildings side-by-side along the same street as ours, and as I passed one of them, I read on its sign that faced the street the ringing declaration, “He is not here.”

As I drove along to our congregation my first thought was, “That’s odd; why won’t He be there? He will certainly be there with *us* when *we* worship Him.”

My second thought was an equally uncharitable one: “If He won’t be there, why advertise that fact? Who would want to come to any church where he knows he will not meet Our Lord?”

### **Development:**

My first and perhaps a bit triumphalist reaction to that sign was probably the result of the Easter Mass which I was shortly to celebrate and which I was just then going over in my mind. So the first flash of surprise at that seemingly strange message on the sign hit me precisely as I was preoccupied in contemplating Our Lord’s Real Presence that was shortly to come among us in the consecrated elements on the altar and in wondering what I could say to our congregation that could be worthy of that miracle.

So I automatically contrasted Our Lord’s Real Presence, which I knew was about to come into our congregation, with His “Real Absence” which that other group seemed determined to announce.

Of course, that blooper of a sign was the result of someone’s Biblical literalism’s trumping common sense. Whoever chose that message was so narrowly focused on telling the story of Our Lord’s Resurrection, and on doing so in the precise words of Scripture, that he or she lost sight of the reason for that Resurrection and the preceding Passion.

Christ died and rose again from the dead just so that He could be with us, that is with each of us and in each of our congregations, every time we gather together for the public worship of the Church. That is why He promised us, “[L]o, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” Notice, however, that there is a catch to His being ever with us: He promised to be with us when we are “observ[ing] all things whatsoever [He] commanded [us].” Including especially His command that we go out and evangelize the world.

Where that evangelistic imperative was a command given to the whole body of the eleven surviving Apostles, in their collective capacity as the leaders of His new Church-information, clearly its associated promise to be with us was also intended to mean He would be with us in His Church. This is consistent with His other similar declarations.

Thus when He said, “[W]here two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them”, “gathered together in my name” obviously refers to the official gathering of the Christian community for public worship.

So what our Christian brothers and sisters of that other denomination overlooked, when they composed and displayed outside their building the angel’s affirmation that “He is not here”, was the rest of the angel’s statement: “He is not here: for he is risen, as he said.”

### **Conclusion:**

Both parts of that omitted portion of the angel’s explanation are important to us. First, “he is risen”. This means that His purpose in coming to Earth in a human body has now been fulfilled. In His risen Body, He is no longer subject to the physical limitations of time and space that apply to bodies here on Earth. That is the explanation for why, in each congregation of the Catholic Church throughout the world, He can be present with us in His Body and Precious Blood in the Sacrament, all while His risen Body is in heaven.

Second, the angel told the two Marys, “he is risen, *as he said*.” In other words, His Resurrection was in fulfillment of the teachings He had been giving to His Apostles and other disciples during the latter part of His earthly ministry. So, too, His continual presence among us in His Church and, especially, His repeated and assured presence for us in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, is “as he said”, that is, is in fulfillment of His Covenant promise to us.

So, traditionally, this morning one Christian traditionally meets another with the greeting, “Christ is risen!”, to which the second responds, “He is risen indeed!”

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*The Rev’d Canon John A. Hollister, JD  
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*1 Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER x (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).*

*2 Isaiah 25:1-9 (KJV).*

*3 St. Matthew 28:1-10, 16-20 (KJV).*

*4 St. Matthew 28:5-6a (KJV).*

*5 St. Matthew 28:20b (KJV).*

*6 St. Matthew 28:20a. (KJV), alt.*

*7 St. Matthew 28:19.*

*8 St. Matthew 18:20 (KJV).*

*9 St. Matthew 28:6a (KJV).*

*10 St. Luke 24:13-31, cf., St. Mark 16:12; St. Luke 24:33-36, cf., St. John 20:19.*

*11 This apparent, but actually meaningless, conundrum was a continued preoccupation of the Protestant Reformers.*

*12 St. Matthew 28:6a (KJV).*

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