

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER

Easter Sunday¹

Lessons:

The First Lesson:² Here beginneth the twenty-fifth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.³

“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:⁴ Here beginneth the twentieth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. John.⁵

“The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene [*magg-duh-LEE-knee*] early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. Then she runneth, and cometh to

Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith [SETH] unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him. Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre. So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre. And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed. For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again unto their own home.”

Text:

From the Second Lesson: *“Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed. For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again unto their own home.”*⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

The victory is won. Death is conquered, evil is defeated.

While the bewildered and shaken disciples could not have comprehended how it could be so on that Sunday morning when they found an empty tomb, the sorrowful marks left there told of a powerful battle and a glorious victory won by our Lord, Jesus.

The linens left in the tomb lay empty, no longer holding a bloody and beaten body, but now they bore the evidence of a victorious body, risen and restored. They were not thrown aside, as they might have been had the body been stolen away, but were lying on the bier still wrapped exactly as they had been wound around Christ’s body, only now they were empty, like an envelope from which the letter has been extracted.

The bandage which had wrapped Jesus' head in death was also still wrapped, only now placed to the side by itself, clearly an act of care and intent.

As the disciples would soon learn, Jesus was not dead, but alive. He had risen from the dead, breaking the bonds of death and opening the path to salvation.

Mary Magdalene [*magg-duh-LEE-knee*] and the other women had returned to the tomb before light to anoint the body of the Lord with spices and oils – fragrances for the dead. They could not do so on the Sabbath, which was Saturday, and so they waited until “the first day of the week”, that is, Sunday. Little did they know and less could they comprehend that Jesus was no longer dead, but alive, and that their spices and oils would not be needed as they normally were used to anoint a body that would lie forever in a tomb.

The stone tomb, which had been sealed by orders of Pilate, and a watch placed to guard it, could not hold Jesus, any more than death could defeat Him. The rolling of a stone across the entry to the tomb to seal it seems pathetic and childish when we consider that it was God Himself Whom the tomb was supposed to hold.

In his account, St. Luke says two angels appeared to Mary and the other women at the grave, and asked them, “*Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.*”⁷

First the clear statement that Jesus is not dead but alive: “*Why seek ye the living among the dead?*” The grave is a place for the dead, and the living are not to be found there. Therefore, to seek the living God in a place of the dead is foolish.

Then, the reason that Jesus is no longer in the grave – where the women had themselves seen Him placed: “*He is not here, but is risen.*”

He was in the grave before, but no longer. His body was not stolen, nor hidden, but resumed life and is risen. He is not here because He has left this place.

The shock of the Crucifixion could have destroyed the nascent Church, causing it to be stillborn.

The disciples clearly were convinced that the ministry and cause of Jesus Christ had suffered some terrible setback if it not been completely destroyed by its founder's murder. They did not understand why the events that had happened had to occur as they had.

The words of Jesus Himself, as the angel reminded the grieving women, explain it all: *“Remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.”*

The Crucifixion had to occur because it was an integral part of God's plan for humanity. The Crucifixion was not a terrible accident that resulted from events that careened out of control, but instead was the completion of God's own plan for the redemption of His people through the sacrifice of His Son. It was the means by which their sins could be forgiven.

This was hard for the disciples to understand, and it is hard for us to comprehend today as well.

But the reality is the paradox that Jesus defeated death by dying. He triumphed over the grave by passing through it to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Death could not stop Him, the grave could not hold Him.

If death is defeated, then we need not fear it. We can live our lives free from the fear of anything the world can do to us. We are a people truly born again into a new state of life where we are freed from sin and death.

As we are joined with Jesus Christ at our Baptism into a new life created by our Lord when He rose triumphant from the grave, so we can

walk forward in that new life unhampered by the old. We stand then, at the precipice of an eternal tomorrow.

By the mighty grace and power of His Resurrection, the pathway to eternity is opened and made accessible to each of us. All the things that once stood in our way are done away with. By the mercy of God we are invited to walk through the gates to eternal life.

What once would have been impossible is become possible to us through Jesus Christ's sacrifice on our behalf. The power of the devil to stand in our way is destroyed. The victory is won. Death is conquered, evil is defeated.

Alleluia! The Lord is risen! The Lord is risen indeed!

Let us pray.

Holy, Risen Lord, we raise our voices in praise at this Thy Resurrection morning. Let us always be mindful of the mighty victory over sin and death that Thou hast won. Let us never lose sight of Thee, and never cease to remember our debt of praise and thanksgiving which we Thine unworthy servants do wish to provide. This we pray for Thy eternal Kingship over us. Amen.

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The Rev'd Larry Wagoner, MSW⁸
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¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion for Easter Sunday, 2013.

² *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xx (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

³ Isaiah 25: 1-9 (KJV).

⁴ "Upon any Sunday or Holy Day, the Minister may read the Epistle or the Gospel of the Day in place of the Second Lesson at Morning or Evening Prayer." *Concerning the Service of the Church*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁵ St. John 20:1-10 (KJV).

⁶ St. John 20:8-10 (KJV).

⁷ St. Luke 24:5-7 (KJV).

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