**Luke 24:1-12 April 17, 2022 (Easter Sunday)**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson, Luke chapter 24 here re-reading these words. “The men said to them, ‘Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Doesn’t it feel good to win? I’m talking about the kind of excitement and joy that comes only when you have everything on the line, when you are personally invested, when the outcome will affect you and your situation and your very life. Now bragging is sinful, rubbing a victory in an opponent’s face or belittling them for losing and antagonizing others, being mean to them in their loss that is sinful, we are not called to be mean to our neighbor in their time of sadness, but I’m talking about the sort of response from a victory and triumph that can’t stay inside you but has to be let out. The joy that can only come from truly and deeply caring about what happens. These moments are rare, we find them in the biggest games, but not all the games can be big. You think about the sheer number of sports teams and games and competitions all around the world every single day and it’s impossible to care about each and every single one. Even when your team plays it’s probably just another game in the regular season, how can you get really excited about that? It’s a recent fad but after the Supreme Court’s ruling concerning sports gambling it’s very popular nowadays to put money down on games. Any sport, any team, any moment really can matter, because you have something on the line, you’ve put money down on a team that isn’t even a team you are a fan of, and it can drum up excitement. This gives a superficial excitement though, you are invested but it’s not the same. I’m not talking about a superficial sort of care that only can be drummed up by putting money down or some sort of excitement that comes being a fan of a team that someone else likes, I’m talking about the sort of reaction that can’t be contained inside you when you win. You aren’t out there playing, or doing, or making it happen but once they win you win because the outcome will change your life in some way, you feel the excitement of their victory and triumph.

And as a Christian, is there a greater victory than Easter? Is there a higher day in the Church Year? Christmas is a wonderful day where we observe the birth of Jesus Christ in a more soft and cozy setting, the tree and the lights in the midst of the darkness at night singing, after all the favorite tradition is singing Silent Night with candles, excited for the King who has come, but not necessarily talking as much about what the King will actually do. If Christmas is Silent Night than Easter…well….Easter is the opposite. Easter is different. It is a loud morning of victory. Today is a day of excitement at the very start and most importantly today is a day of triumph. In our Gospel lesson we begin with the women getting up at early dawn, walking to the tomb to observe the defeat that all of Jesus’ followers must have felt for the past 3 days. Jesus, the very Son of God, beaten, bruised, bleeding and dying, giving up His Spirit and placed in a tomb. That was the last picture of our Savior on Friday, the slamming shut of the tomb and it seemed it was all over. For the entirety of that Sabbath Day there was rest, calm, and quiet. For these followers of Jesus it was the end. Kind of like a bewildered fan after a crushing defeat how they just sit there, and stare. Everyone else leaves, the game’s over, but they don’t know what to do with themselves, this was supposed to be the big day, the day of triumph, and yet it was a day of great sadness. The crowds who cheered for victory at the start of the week are now indifferent to the plight of their Savior, crucify Him! Away with Him! They were turncoat Fairweather, band wagon kinds of followers, it was off to the next thing. But not the women…not the disciples…they cared, what happened was important to them personally and they felt defeated and lost. But then….hope. The stone has been rolled away. The body of Jesus is not there. The two men standing in dazzling apparel. Angels from what is said later in the Gospel of Luke. The women are perplexed, confused, these are obviously different looking individuals, their clothing is dazzling, maybe this is some kind of cruel trick and they will be defeated again. They bow down frightened, but then, the greatest line of victory you could possibly imagine. The words that define our entire lives as Christians and the reason for all of the decorations, the joy, the praise, and the triumph that we feel on this particular high point of the entire Church year. “Why do you seek the living among the dead? **He is not here, but has risen.”**

There is no need for an earthly incentive to bring about our joy because this, my dear friends, this is our triumph over death and sin and Satan himself. Jesus was delivered into the hands of sinful men and crucified, and on the 3rd day he rose. He has triumphed over the grave. He has destroyed death not just for himself, but for all of us because sin is our reality since birth, and sin equals death, but now sin has been atoned for, paid for by His actions on the cross, and life itself has been given to us beloved children of God. It’s more than just a victory for Jesus, who was dead but now is alive, it’s your victory, like your team winning a championship, like you getting a promotion, or your family winning some contest, it’s personal! It’s your story, it’s your victory, Jesus has defeated death for you and now you are saved.

It’s the kind of joy that can’t stay inside, and yet we look around and we see such indifference in our world, and sadly even in our own midst. Easter becomes just another day, or some sort of Spring tradition. What is Easter outside of the victory of Jesus Christ? How can we even compare the resurrection of Jesus Christ to candy eggs and a bunny and some baskets? There is no comparison! You think of the joy you feel being such a diehard fan of something and they finally win and you compare it to hearing that some team won some game, there is no comparison! There is no incentivizing your excitement for something you don’t truly and deeply care about, and sadly that’s what we find. We find it out there, and we find it in here. Jesus lives, the victory is won, but how does it change your life? How does it affect your actions? Will they know of His victory through what you say and what you do? Or will it be just another day? Another week? Another season? This is the greatest triumph in our lives and the high point of the whole year, and when we go out into the world will anyone even be able to tell…or will we hide it all away? If you say you are a Christian, and yet you don’t care about Easter…then what are you even talking about? And we know some who fall into that category. People we will see later on today who may even be members of this church, and yet couldn’t be bothered to come and worship on the highest day of the entire Church year. And yet the victory is theirs as well, even if they don’t realize it. But we are happy to stay in our own lane, not offend, not rock the boat, or we even are in denial about their lack of faith.

The story of Jesus death is hard to hear because of how believable it is and how uncomfortable it is to see a man be killed in such a horrific way. We don’t like to dwell on it, it may be why you are here on Easter Sunday and you weren’t there on Good Friday. We don’t like to think about it as much, we don’t like to see Jesus hurt and hanging and dying. But the story of Easter is hard to hear because of how unbelievable it is. It’s no different for the apostles. They hear the testimony of these women and the words seemed to them to be an “idle tale”. Even after they were told specifically by Jesus what would happen! “Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.” He told them! And they didn’t believe. The women told them it happened! They didn’t believe. Peter finally goes for himself and stoops in and finds the linen clothes and no Jesus, and he…marvels. It’s so hard to believe the things that are life changing, extraordinary, and amazing even if you are told the truth over and over from different sources.

It’s why it’s so important today, to stop for just a second and really reflect on what has happened and know with certainty through the work of the Holy Spirit that what we are talking about, what we’ve heard from Christmas to Easter, from the Passion, to the cross, to the tomb as we find it in the Gospels and the rest of Scripture bears witness to the coming Savior Jesus Christ, all of it, everything you find in the words of Holy Scripture are true… it happened. It really happened. And you in your own Confirmation vows, as the girls did last week, have vowed that you believe them and that you will hold to that belief to your own death. But he is not dead, this was not some sort of hoax or conspiracy, there is no need for speculation or to put yourself higher than God that this is just a celebration of a nice story about something that will make us feel good, but it’s too crazy to be true. He is not dead. He is risen. And even in our own hearts there will be marveling, and disbelief…it’s too good to be true, or even a sense of it not really mattering in the grand scheme of our lives because we believe we didn’t need forgiveness, but all of that must be washed away in the blood of the Lamb of God. You may know those who don’t think this is their story, their victory, their triumph, and our own indifference to their own faith is a failure of our care for them in their journey to the cross and to the tomb. But our joy on this day replaces sin and death, because of the victory of Jesus Christ. And this joy is such that we can go to them, wherever they are, and whenever we see them, and take the joy of Easter, the true joy, the joy that comes from the empty tomb, the joy that is infused into so many other Easter traditions that have been adopted without people even realizing how it points to Christ, and celebrate with them the truth. Their team won, your team won, everyone won because death was defeated. The triumph of Christ is a celebration that can’t be contained.

The joy of Easter ends. For some it will end today. The Church continues for 40 days of celebration, but the world will keep creeping into our lives and we will feel the guilt and shame of sin, we will feel the worry of death, we will be tempted by Satan and his demons. So I leave you with a quote from Martin Luther on this glorious day, and how Christ’s triumph is yours to lift you through the hard times and to remind you of the joy of this wonderful day. “Know ye, then…sin, death, devil and everything that assails me…that you are missing the mark. I am not one of those who are afraid of you. For Christ, my dear Lord, has presented to me that triumph and victory of His by which you were laid low. And from this very gift of His I derive my name and am called a Christian. There is no other reason. My sin and death hung about His neck on Good Friday, but on the day of Easter they had completely disappeared. This victory He has bestowed on me. This is why I do not worry about you.”

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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