**Matthew 28: 1-10 April 12, 2020 (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 the Gospel of Matthew the 28th chapter here re-reading these words. “An angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen.’” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It would be hard to find a higher point in the Church Year than Easter Sunday. It is the culmination of 40 days of meditation upon our sinfulness in the season of Lent. It is the final and glorious conclusion to Holy Week. And more than just it’s ceremonial significance or even how our society has deemed it a day full of chocolate bunnies and Easter Egg hunts, this is the final moment of salvation. This is the fulfillment of what God said in the garden to Eve about her offspring that would come and crush the head of the serpent who would only bruise the heel of the Savior. This is the destruction of any ill-fated idea that the devil was victorious over Jesus Christ. This is Christ’s victory over death and the grave, in grand fashion. This is the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Nothing can change that. No earthly celebration could possibly be worthy of that. While this year is so vastly different and unprecedented, and this may be the first Easter that you haven’t been able to worship in a sanctuary with your brothers and sisters in Christ, it doesn’t take away the truth of what happened. It can’t change the salvation that has been won.

Christ has truly risen from the dead and we have the eye-witnesses of Holy Scripture to thank for their testimony that it’s true. Matthew goes into great detail to show that it was not just the testimony of the women who went to the tomb that morning that gives evidence of Jesus Christ rising from the dead, but that the guards who were there also give a report in the later parts of Matthew chapter 28. And even though we can’t get together this day, we look forward to meeting throughout this Easter season, hopefully by the grace of God in a few weeks, and see Jesus Christ appearing again and again to His disciples to reinforce the truth of what He had said in His earthly ministry. That He must go to Jerusalem and die and on the third day, be raised from the dead.

But while we stop for a moment and think about the majesty and the shock that the women must have felt seeing an angel and then going off to tell the disciples only to run into Jesus Christ himself, let’s stop for a moment, and ponder what these Roman guards at the tomb experienced on Easter morning.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead was perceived in different ways by different people. Easter, for us Children of God, is a glorious day of light and life. Nothing can change that. It is when we traditionally decorate the church with Easter lilies. This year, it is recommended you make your own out of paper. It is the day when we sing songs of praise like “I know that my Redeemer lives” and “Jesus Christ is Risen Today!” You can still do that! Even from the comfort of your own home. It is a glorious celebration of the triumphant victory of Christ over the grave. And we know that Jesus Christ has come to share with us His victory over death because of the eye-witnesses that record His Words and the words of the angel that tell us “Do not be afraid”. But while Christ’s resurrection is comfort to our ears, the message of Easter has not been communicated to everyone. Especially that first Easter morning there was no comfort at the sight of the angel from heaven. There was fear. Fear of retribution, and fear of what Christ rising from the dead truly meant for those who had killed the Son of God.

Put yourself in the place of the guards outside the tomb for a moment. Here is Jesus Christ, the Son of God that not too long ago, was being mocked and spat upon by Roman guards, just like those that were charged with guarding his tomb. Jesus was beaten by them, humiliated by them, scourged and whipped by them and finally nailed to the cross, by their hands. It isn’t too big of a stretch to say that the Roman guards didn’t believe that this truly was the omnipotent Son of God that they were beating and mocking, because if they did believe that Jesus would rise again, would they really have gone to such great lengths to hurt him? Think about it for a moment, if you were a Roman guard and you even thought for a second, that the one you were physically hurting was the Son of the creator of the world, the Son of the everlasting God, would you really continue to torture Him? I’m sure these guards outside the tomb had witnessed Christ’s beatings or even participated in it themselves. So, imagine their shock when they felt a great earthquake and saw the angel of the Lord descend from heaven, roll back the stone, and then sit upon it. Imagine what they thought when they saw the holiness of this angel of God whose appearance was like lightning and whose clothing was white as snow.

It turns out, Jesus was exactly who He said that He was. It turns out that Jesus was the Son of God, and in that moment there was no doubt. Even at His death we see the faith of the centurion who sees the cataclysmic events that took place, where darkness came and the dead rose and walked among the people, and his declaration was that this truly was the Son of God. Now these guards experienced the power of God firsthand. Matthew describes that their fear was so great that they trembled and became like *dead men.* You can imagine their fear and what it meant that Jesus was back. It was a day of reckoning for them. A day of revenge. A day when they would receive the payback for all of the terrible things that Jesus had to go through.

We pray these words in the Lord’s Prayer, “For Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory, forever and ever. Amen.” Forever. God’s power is shown forever, even in the years that are different, and where we have to observe such high holy days in isolation. Kingdom. He is truly the King of Kings. He was a beaten down king, he was a crucified king. We now witness Our Resurrected King, but couldn’t he also be a King out for revenge? A King of revenge upon those who had brought about his crucifixion? What was the word that seemed to continue to come up when talking about Maundy Thursday? Blood. And while the Roman guards were to blame for the pain of Christ’s passion, so are we. What does it mean that Jesus has risen from the dead? Is this truly a source of comfort and peace? How could it be for those who betrayed and sinned against our Lord and Savior? The women experience fear at the sight of Jesus, they fall down at his feet and worship him. The disciples are hiding in fear of the Jews, and also with the knowledge that they abandoned their Savior. Christ has risen from the dead, but could this be nothing more than a moment of come-uppance when we all will have to pay for our sins against him?

It certainly is a different way of seeing this glorious holiday. But let’s not think for a moment that Jesus would not be justified to rise from the dead and seek revenge on those who sinned against him. What would we do if we were in His shoes? What have we done in the past to those who have betrayed us and caused us physical or emotional pain? How have we looked upon them? Do we show mercy? Do we show love? Or do we seek revenge upon them? Do we think about their needs or do we only focus on our own? Would we even reach out a loving hand to them, or would we wash our hands of their blood just as Pontius Pilate did of Jesus?

We seek revenge in our lives, and we fail to show mercy and love to others. We don’t deserve the love that Jesus Christ shows to us. But thankfully Christ does not look at us with revenge on his mind. He did not rise from the dead to bring destruction to those who put him on the cross. He did not rise from the dead to wipe the slate clean and then abandon us so that we would now have a chance to save ourselves. No, His resurrection declares His victory and his power, and his glory, and make us part of his kingdom. Victory over sin, death, and the grave for, all, people. He came to show that those who had sinned against him were forgiven, and that he truly does separate our sin as far as the East is from the West. He does not hold grudges. He does not seek revenge. His resurrection is the culmination of His work of redemption, and the sign for us, that death is simply the beginning to life everlasting. For we are His children. And we shall rise again.

The amazing love of Jesus Christ is that He submitted himself unto death, in order to save those who were killing him. And that includes those Roman guards at the cross and at the tomb. It includes the chief priests. It includes Judas the betrayer, and the other disciples who abandoned him. And it’s very important for you to hear this morning, that it includes you as well. It includes you regardless of the fact that you aren’t able to come to His house. It includes you even in the midst of lockdown, quarantine, and isolation. It includes you regardless of what you have done. Regardless of how terrible you may believe that you are. No matter how far gone you think you may be. Jesus Christ died for you. He shows his amazing love in that even the guards who guarded his tomb, and fell down as if they were dead at the sight of the angel of the Lord, Jesus Christ died and rose again for them. He loves you, whether you are His child from the moment you were born and baptized or if you have rejected Him your entire life. He loves you. And he welcomes you, as His child into His loving arms. To those who repent and confess their sins Jesus forgives them without a second thought. Without any thought of revenge. Without even remembering the sins that were done against Him. That’s his love. It’s a perfect love. And it is the love that He shows to all of us, regardless of age, race, heritage, gender, or nationality. His love is shown to both Jew and Gentile. Slave and free. He shows His love to all people of all time, with the promise, that His victory over death and the grave is theirs, without any condition. It is a gift that He gives freely to those whom He loves. And he’s not hindered or shackled to only give that love in his house. Nothing can change what happened on Easter morning, and nothing can change his love for us.

May that be your comfort throughout this strange Easter celebration we are experiencing. May that be your comfort amidst pestilence, sickness, and despair. We live in a world of pain and death, even on Easter morning. We still live knowing loved ones who are suffering. Knowing that hospitals are overloaded with patients and that all of us will one day die. But our comfort, is that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead not for revenge, but to destroy death forever. No matter what we suffer here in this life, we know that the victory is won. We are His. And His victory is our victory. Death could not contain Jesus Christ, Death was not the end but only the beginning. And so it is with us. Death is not the end of the our happiness, because our happiness lies in the life that is to come. It lies in the arms of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who died for us.

God bless you this Easter. God be with you this entire Easter season and the days and weeks to come, when hopefully we will be together again, singing our favorite Easter hymns, and observing Holy Week together. God keep you steadfast in His Word, and may you carry this day of victory with you out into this world, when we are able, praying that day is coming soon, so that we may point them to the cross where sin was paid for, and to the tomb where death was destroyed. May God keep you forever in His peace and His love, from this time forth and even forevermore.

Amen.

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

Amen.