



St. James Lutheran Church

Dear Friends,

In this Holy Week our attention is drawn to the central story of our faith: Christ's death and resurrection. All the gospel narratives slow down and become more detailed when they come to the final dramatic week of Christ's ministry. The gospels have been described as passion narratives with long introductions. Our faith stands on what transpired in those final days. The crucifixion that seemed like a terrible disaster instead becomes a sign of the depth of God's love for us. And the resurrection changes everything. Jaroslav Pelikan summed it up very succinctly: "If Christ is not raised from the dead, then nothing else matters. If Christ is not raised from the dead, then nothing else matters."

Blessed Easter,
Richard

First Reading: *Acts 10: 34-43*

Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ--he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

Reflection: *In a short sermon Peter relates the essential elements of the gospel story of Jesus: his life, his death, his resurrection. He tells how the disciples were commissioned by Jesus to tell this story, and to share the news that all who believe in Jesus receive forgiveness of sins through his name.*

✝ Try to imagine the transformation of Peter from a man who denied he even knew Jesus, to a man who boldly preaches about him. How does Christ's resurrection change you?

✝ How does the Easter story help you to believe that sins truly can be forgiven?

Second Reading: Colossians 3: 1-4

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

Reflection: St. Paul speaks to the implications of Christ's resurrection. Through baptism Christians have shared in Christ's death and his resurrection, so now we are called to live a new life. We are not to be consumed by all the demands of life on earth. We need to focus "on the things that are above", to always remember our true life is life in Christ. In the rest of chapter 3 Paul explores the particulars of what this means for us.

- ✝ What comes to mind for you when you consider "the things that are above"?
- ✝ Since we have died with Christ, how are we set free from things that threaten and frighten us in this world?

Gospel John 20: 1-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to

him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Reflection: Each gospel writer tells the story of Easter in his own way. John relates the story through the experiences of Mary Magdalene. She is the first to discover the empty tomb, and then the first to encounter the risen Christ, who calls her by name. She experiences a whirlwind of emotions, from profound grief, to questioning confusion, to deep and lasting joy. Mary announces to the disciples: "I have seen the Lord".

✠ How would it feel to hear Jesus call you by name?

✠ How does the Easter story affect how you feel about death?

Prayer of the Day:

O God, you gave your only Son to suffer death on the cross for our redemption, and by his glorious resurrection you delivered us from the power of death. Make us die every day to sin, so that we may live with him forever in the joy of the resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.