

Resurrection of our Lord-March 31,2024

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

Acts 10:34-43, 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, and Mark 16:1-8

"He Appeared" Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and from his Son, who has risen from the dead for you and from the Holy Spirit who has gathered you here this day to hear again this good news that is for you. Amen
This is it! The most important of all events in the life of a Christian. Easter.

Since the church year began with the season of Advent last December, we have heard many of the high points in the life of Jesus. Christmas is a great day to celebrate as we remember that Jesus who was fully God came down from heaven to earth and became fully human. But this is not the event that Paul cites in our second lesson today as being of first importance or as in the Greek translation says is the chief reason Jesus came to earth. In January we heard the story when Jesus was baptized, and this too is not a day to be overlooked. It is an important day when we remember Jesus who was without sin and after this event started to take on the sins of the whole world. But Paul doesn't mention the Baptism of Jesus as being of first importance. Then there are several other mountain top experiences in the life of Jesus like when Peter, James and John saw the holiness and brilliance of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. But this event was not mentioned by Paul as making the list of what is of chief importance in the life of Jesus. The feeding of the 5000 was so miraculous that all four gospel writers included this story in their accounts, but again, Paul doesn't turn to the filling of the stomachs of a multitude of hungry people as being the greatest thing Jesus ever did. If it takes a story about bringing someone from the grave to life again, Jesus did that at least three different times by raising the son of the widow of Nain, Jarius' daughter, and Lazarus from death to life. None of these are the chief reasons for celebrating Easter.

But here is what is of first importance! I am handing to you today the same message that Paul handed over to his congregation who heard him proclaim what was of chief importance in the life of Jesus, "Christ died for your sins according to the scriptures, he was buried, and he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures."

In the first reading for today, Peter also preached a post Easter sermon by first recalling many of the wonderful works that Jesus performed while he was on earth. But Peter ends his sermon doing what Jesus commanded him to do when he said. Preach to the people this message of first importance. Everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins through his name. Jesus doesn't just offer the forgiveness of sins. You receive it! You are the beneficiary of Easter!

This wasn't the message that was first remembered by the three women who were the first to go to the tomb of Jesus on the first Easter morning as we just heard described from the gospel of Mark. They came to the tomb only remembering the death of Jesus. They came to complete the preparing the body of Jesus for his burial. Maybe you haven't thought of yourself as doing what these three women were doing that morning. But many of you know what it is like going to a funeral home bringing along with you the clothes that your loved one will be buried in or special jewelry that they have worn throughout their life. Many of you have discussed with others that the loss of a loved one seems to have placed an obstacle too hard for you to move away like the large stone that the women worried would prevent them from doing the work they came to do.

Then as these women approached the tomb of Jesus on that first Easter morning things started to change. The stone that they feared they couldn't move was already rolled away. But they only believed that the stone that was moved would now allow them to complete their work of preparing the body of Jesus. But when the women went inside the tomb to do their work, there was no work to do. Death was removed. They witnessed life. Not only was the stone moved for them, but now the body of Jesus was no longer where they expected it to be. The young man must have seen the fear in the eyes of these women who expected to see the body of a dead Jesus but now were looking at a young man they didn't know. But this young man had a message for these women. He told them not to be alarmed and they hadn't come to the wrong place. This was the place where Jesus was laid, but he was no longer there.

Last week, I made a second visit to someone in a hospital in Sioux Falls. I had visited them only a few days before for the first time. I still had the room number where I first visited him, and it was conveniently close to the elevator. I went to this same room, but the man in the bed was not the same man that I had visited before. My first instinct was that somehow, I went into the wrong room. I take that back. My first instinct and fear was that this man had died. A nurse came by noticing my confused look and asked who I was looking for. I told her his name and she told me there was no one on that floor with that name. He wasn't there anymore and what bothered me most was that I didn't know where he was. She told me not to worry and that sometimes, people get moved to the adjacent wing. We asked a nurse on that wing if they knew this man and she told me that he was in a room on that floor. Knowing that he was indeed somewhere helped, but the only thing that calmed my fears completely was when I heard his voice call my name.

The Easter story from the gospel of Mark tends to leave you and I in the wrong room still wondering where Jesus has gone. The women who were told by the young man to tell Jesus' disciples and Peter specifically that Jesus had been raised from the dead just as he said would take place, left the tomb of Jesus in fear, and told no one because they were afraid.

After hearing this account of the resurrection of Jesus, I could help but compare it to the story of Jonah. Jonah was told to preach to a specific group of people a message of forgiveness, but he didn't. The women were told to tell a specific group of people that Jesus had risen from the dead, but they didn't. But Jonah, the women at the tomb, nor anyone else could stop the central message of Easter which is that your sins are forgiven from being proclaimed throughout the world.

The man told the women to tell the disciples and Peter that he had risen. But when they didn't, Jesus did what he promised would happen. Jesus began appearing and preaching the good news of his resurrection. Paul described in the second lesson who all Jesus made appearances to. Jesus appeared to Peter, who was also called Cephas. Jesus then appeared to the rest of the disciples. Jesus broadened his audience and appeared to a group of 500 men and women at once. He appeared to James and Paul ends by saying that Jesus even appeared to him, the most unfit to be an apostle because he persecuted the church of God.

Today, Jesus has made another appearance. He has appeared in this place for you to know there is no obstacle in your way to prevent you from knowing where Jesus is and what he left his grave to do. Jesus is risen and he has appeared to you and his chief message is clear, "Your sins are forgiven." And because that, death, and the graves of all who have died in Christ will be empty too. Amen