

St. Peter Lutheran Church - Modesto, CA

✠ The Resurrection of our Lord ✠

April 8, 2007

Sermon by Pastor Johann Caauwe

“After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. ² There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴ The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

⁵ The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.”

⁸ So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.””

(Matthew 28:1-10)

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! What a glorious day this is! Jesus Christ, who once was dead, has now risen from the dead just as he said. After all the gloom and sadness of Holy week; after all the struggle and the discipline of Lent—finally, alleluias; songs of joy and praise, finally, an altar clothed in white adorned with beauty, finally, a candle lit once more to symbolize the visible presence of the risen Christ. Now, finally, we’ll see Jesus’ true glory, right?

But haven’t we seen Jesus’ glory all through Lent? At every step along the way we’ve seen just how glorious Jesus really is, but, of course, that glory is hidden in his suffering and his cross. Should we really be surprised then, even on this most glorious and joyous day, to find Jesus’ glory still hidden? Did you catch that in St. Matthew’s report? Where was the glory there? Who appears glorious in his account? Did you catch it? It’s not Jesus! It’s an angel. The angel descends from heaven, knocks open the grave, and sits on the stone that covered the opening. Where is Jesus? The truth is, he has already done his great works, but he did them hidden from sight. On Easter Sunday his body and soul were reunited in the grave. But no one saw it. It was hidden. Then Jesus came out of the grave while the stone was still firmly in place. But again, the glory was hidden. No one saw that. The only one that appears glorious in St. Matthew’s report is the angel who rolled away the stone. His appearance was like lightning, and his face, white as snow. The visible effect of that angel was glorious too. Those tough soldiers who knew how to stare death in the face were no match for the glory of the angel. Stunned and terrified, they fell down like dead men.

When the women arrive at the tomb, the soldiers have apparently recovered and have already run into the city to report to the chief priests. But the angel is still there. He speaks to the women

who had come expecting to anoint the dead body of Jesus and to finish the funeral that was left unfinished on Good Friday. To their amazement, the stone has already been rolled away, and there is only this angel who also frightens them by his glorious appearance. His message, however, is even more glorious than his appearance. "Go in and look," he tells them. "See, he is not here. He has risen, just as he said he would. Go and tell the disciples. He will see them in Galilee, just as he said he would!"

Now, isn't that all still a bit of a disappointment? On this most glorious day, wouldn't we rather see Jesus, the risen Jesus, looking even more glorious than the angel? Don't we want to see him robed in splendor, with his face shining like the sun and his garments white as the light? Don't we want to see him looking the way he will look on the Last Day? On the first Easter day and on this easter, shouldn't we see Jesus with glory to match the event we're celebrating?

The answer is no! We see his glory on Easter Sunday in the same way he showed his glory to the women at the tomb. After they ran from the tomb at the command of the angel, Jesus appears to them. But how does he appear? With his glory hidden! And thank God for that! Think about it. If the appearance of an angel in glory caused the soldiers to fall down like dead men and filled the women with fear, what, then, would happen to us if we would see Jesus in all his resurrection glory? Wouldn't we freeze in terror or die of fright right on the spot? What joy would there be then? But no. This day is a day of joy for the heart and gladness to the soul. And that is precisely because Jesus, on this day, still hides his glory. He doesn't need to put his best on display and make sure that everyone is impressed by his might and his majesty. He does not want to intimidate us by that kind of appearing. Only on the Last day will Jesus appear in majesty and glory. Not today. Not on Easter Sunday.

So even on Easter Sunday, he hides his glory. He appears to the women in the same humble form that they knew and recognized. Notice how differently they react to his appearance than to the angel's appearance. There is no dread, no fear, no terror. They run to him, not away from him. They fall down before him in worship and adoration. They are so filled with joy that they grab him by his feet. He is risen! He is risen indeed! And he has not come to terrify but to comfort and console. The work he finished on Good Friday is truly finished. Sin has all been paid for, covered in his blood. And now is the great day to proclaim the glory of that victory.

And the glory is hidden, hidden in his words. In two short sentences, he sums it all up. He tells the women, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Don't be afraid! What a beautiful summary of our Easter joy and of the gospel. Without Good Friday and Easter Sunday—the two cannot be separated without missing the point of both of them—we would have nothing in this life but fear. Fallen with Adam and Eve in the garden, we were separated from God by our sin. Death was our lot for this life, and hell was our future in the next. But Jesus died and has risen. He did exactly what he said he would do and what was prophesied concerning him already in the Garden of Eden. He went into battle for us on the cross. And he won. Easter Sunday is the proof of it. He paid for our sin. Don't be afraid; he conquered hell. Don't be afraid; he has triumphed over the grave. Don't be afraid.

But how can I know that he did it for me? You see, my conscience still condemns, and temptations still gnaw and nag. Listen to Jesus' second sentence to the women: "Go and tell my brothers!" What an astonishing thing! He calls the disciples his brothers! But all they did was sleep in

the Garden of Gethsemane after he warned them that they should watch and pray. All they did was run away at the first opportunity, when the soldiers came to arrest Jesus. All they did was behave no better than Peter, who denied that he even knew Jesus. They certainly do not deserve to be called his brothers now, do they? No. And that's exactly the point. That's exactly the glory of Lent and of Easter. The disciples don't deserve it, and neither do we. For we are no better than they. But we are no worse either. Their sins are gone, and our sins are too. They are buried in Jesus' grave. St. Paul says the same about our sins: they are buried in Jesus' grave when we are baptized. And now with the sins covered and hidden away, there is no reason why he should not call the disciples brothers. And yes, there is no reason why he should not call us his brothers and sisters. That's just another way for Jesus to say, "Don't be afraid!" You are by faith and through your baptisms now dear, precious, beloved children of God. That's the glory of Easter! Jesus died. Now he has risen and will never die again! We are redeemed! We are reconciled! Our sin is gone! Hell is conquered! The grave is destroyed!

Don't you see how gentle Jesus is with us, how kind and considerate? Does he show us his glory to scare us to death and send us running away from him in terror? No, he still hides his glory. He hides it in his Word. That's where we will find it. Did you notice how that point was emphasized in the Easter story? Jesus promised that he would rise. And he tells the women to report it to the disciples. He does not appear to them right away. He wants them to depend on the Word. He emphasizes that again when he tells the women to add this detail: he will see the disciples in Galilee. That is what he promised them earlier. Again, he wants them to learn the lesson well, to depend on his Word. For soon his visible presence would no longer be with them when he ascends into heaven on the 40th day. But his real and abiding presence will never go away. Until the end of time, just as he promised, he will be with them in his Word and sacraments.

So, then, do you want to find the glory of Easter? You've come to the right place! Because where his Word is proclaimed and his sacraments celebrated is where you will find his glory. It is in the Word that drives away our fears. For to you no less than to the disciples, he says this day, "Don't be afraid. I am not coming to you this moment in majesty and might to terrify you. I am coming to you with hidden power and glory in my Word. That Word announces and declares that sin is forgiven. Don't be afraid. Tomorrow you will still have problems and temptations aplenty. Don't be afraid. I have died, and see, I am alive. I will not leave you or forsake you. Yes, the grave still lies ahead of you and someday you will die. Don't be afraid. I conquered it all in my death and resurrection. Because I live, you will live also. Death has been defeated, and the grave is the entrance to life eternal."

Go ahead then. Just as the disciples saw Jesus in Galilee and even before that, so you too will see him in splendor in heaven. Yes, and then you will even share in his glory. For you are his brothers, his sisters. Nothing that he has will he hold back from you. And every step of the way, whenever you can, come to his Word and return to his sacraments, so that through the whole journey you may taste and see the glory that is hidden on the cross, the glory that is his resurrection and the promise of your own. **FOR CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED! HALLELUJAH! Amen.**