

Homily for the Resurrection of our Lord, 2020

John 20:1-18

'The new life of the resurrection'

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PRE-AMBLE

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

The text for this Easter Sunday message is John 20:1-18.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, as we hear again the glorious good news of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus from the dead, let your Spirit fill us with faith, hope and joy.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

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INTRODUCTION – mortality rates (335)

In the news lately there have been many discussions about **mortality rates**,
Particularly to do of course with the COVID-19 virus.

I believe the current estimate from the World Health organization is 3.4%,
Which some say is too low,
And many say is far too high.

There are discussions about the mortality rate of this virus versus the regular flu,
In Europe versus the USA,
For the old over against the young,
And for the healthy compared with those who have preexisting conditions.

These are important discussions in our public life.

But let us not fool ourselves into thinking these are the most important questions of life,

Because the Christian message is that there is a far more serious disease at work in the world,
One which infects every single members of the human race,
And one for which the mortality rate is 100%.

The disease is sin,
And the wages of sin is death.

Perhaps our deep awareness of this truth is one of the reasons that crises in our world like this one affect us so profoundly,
Because deep down we know each and everyone of us will die and return to the dust,
And a pandemic like this one reminds us of the confronting truth of this,
And our world offers no lasting answer to this fundamental problem of human existence – that is death.

BUT dear friends,
The good news of Easter,

Is that in Christ Jesus God has intervened in this world to undo death,

To bring healing for our disease of sin in Jesus' sacrifice,

And to usher in a new life that is stronger than death,
In his resurrection.

It's this new life that he wants to share with you.

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As we turn now to our text to think more deeply about this,

We'll see that it's in two scenes,
First the empty tomb,
And second the risen Jesus,

And in each scene there is a transformation,

The first from fear to faith,

And the second from sadness to joy.

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EMPTY TOMB – from fear to faith (600)

So the first scene is of the empty tomb.

And what we want to notice here is how much fear and confusion there is that first Easter morning.

The empty tomb doesn't immediately send the disciples into a frenzy of alleluias,
It scares them,
It bewilders them,
What on earth is going on?

First is Mary Magdalene.

She doesn't even get to look into the tomb at first, but simply sees that the stone has been rolled away and immediately takes off running to find Peter and John,

Generally this mysterious figure 'the disciple who Jesus loved' is understood to be the author of this Gospel, John.

So Mary takes off to find them and has already assumed that Jesus' body has been stolen.

There really is something quite distressing about finding a grave disturbed,
If you've ever had that experience,
And so Mary is fearful of what has happened.

Her news immediately sends Peter and John running to the tomb to see for themselves,
There's a lot of running Easter morning have you noticed,

And boys will be boys so this one even turns into a race,
Which John the younger man reminds us that he won!

But John is a little more cautious than Peter,

He looks in and see the clothes lying there,
But waits outside.

Peter comes and just bursts into the empty tomb straight away,
And he sees not just the linen wrappings lying there that had been around Jesus' body,

But the cloth that been on Jesus' head lying in another spot rolled up by itself.

Now what's going on here?

Why all these detail about the grave clothes?

In the first place it seems to be making the point that in contrast to what Mary Magdalene had assumed,
Jesus' body had not been taken,

Because not only were the cloths still there,

But things were even set in a certain order.

There were no signs of a hasty body snatching,

You know what it like if you get robbed,
Thieves don't usually take the time to fold up shirts nicely and lay them out on the bed for you after they've ransacked the place!

But deeper than this,
There's also a contrast being made here between Jesus and Lazarus I think.

Because remember when Lazarus came out,
The grave clothes were still on him and he had to have them taken off.

Whereas for Jesus,
Something very different has happened.

What happened to Lazarus we might call resuscitation,
Whereas what happened to Jesus we call resurrection.

Lazarus would die again,
Jesus is alive forever.

So to push just a little deeper again,
These lying grave clothes point us to the truth,

That God has intervened here,

The body hasn't been stolen by human beings,

The whole event is not of human origin,

This is a work of God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

And then after Peter as John comes in and he sees,

And we read,

He **believes!**

Their fear is beginning to be transformed to faith.

Although,

There's still some ambiguity here isn't there?

Because we get the final little comment on this scene,

That *'they did not yet understand the Scriptures,*

That he must rise from the dead'.

It's worth us noting that the empty tomb is enough to begin the journey from fear to faith,

But they're not all the way there yet.

It's as they began to understand the Scriptures and encounter the risen Jesus that it all began to come together for them.

Which brings us to scene 2,

The risen Jesus,

Where sadness is turned to joy.

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RISEN JESUS – from sadness to joy (775)

If the first scene is more objective and gives factual details of the empty tomb,

This second scene is more personal and intimate,
And it's quite moving in fact for most people.

Peter and John have gone off home,

But Mary Magdalene remains outside the tomb,
And she's weeping.

Perhaps some of you have spent your fair share of time weeping at the grave of a loved one...

There's something very real and powerful here isn't there?

And as Mary plucks up the courage to look into the tomb,
She sees something different,
Two angels sitting where Jesus body had been.

Jesus was crucified between two thieves,
But two messengers of heaven are beside the place of his resurrection.

Perhaps we're meant to think here too of the two carved cherubim either side of the ark of the covenant over the mercy seat,

Here are two angels flanking Jesus' resting place,
The manifestation of God's mercy,
the once for all sacrifice for sin,

And the angels ask a question which grates somewhat with our ears,
'Woman, why are you weeping?'

Well she says she's at the tomb of her beloved master and she thinks someone has stolen his body,

As if the grief of watching him brutally crucified (remember Mary was at the cross),
and losing him,
wasn't enough,
Now to add insult to injury,
someone is dishonoring him even in his death.

But from the perspective of heaven,

There can be no tears at this empty tomb,

Because this is no longer a place of death,
But of life!

And this is when the risen Jesus appears on the scene.

Mary sees him but doesn't recognize him.

Perhaps her eyes were so full of tears she couldn't see properly.

Or perhaps we are meant to be reminded here that this resurrection life is not simply this life and this body as we know it continuing on after death,
This is something new,
Jesus is raised to glory,

He is still Jesus, to be sure,
And this is a bodily resurrection,

But there is also something new here God is doing,
Notice often his disciples did not recognize him.

Jesus asks the same question as the angels,
Why are you weeping?

But he adds something too,
'For whom are you looking?'

This is a question Jesus is fond of asking actually.

When some of the first disciples starting following Jesus he asked them,
'what are you looking for?'

And when the soldiers came looking to arrest Jesus he asked them,
'Whom are you looking for?'

And this is also question for you this day,

In your fear,
In your sadness,

*For whom are **you** looking for?*

We look to all sorts of people and things to deal with our fear and sadness,
But Jesus wants us to look to him.

*For whom are **you** looking for?*

Mary's still convinced though that the body of Jesus has been stolen,
And think this guy is the Gardner,

Interesting by the way that humanity began in a garden in creation,
And it was Eve who was deceived.

Now here in another garden,
It is Mary Magdalene who is the first witness of the resurrection in the **new creation**.

But what is the moment when Mary realizes who he is?

It's not the empty tomb on it's own,
It's not even a vision of angels,

It's when the Good shepherd calls her by name,
"Mary"!

And in that moment she knew,
He is alive,
He is risen,

her sadness was turned to joy!

Yet,
she can't hold on to him,
She's got a job to do,

She's got to get back to the other disciples and tell them the good news,
That Jesus is risen and he is ascending to the Father,

No no, not the Father,
But get this,

To my father and your father,
To my God and your God.

Notice that beautiful sentence,

The results of Jesus' resurrection are not just for him,
But for the disciples,
For you, dear people of God.

He died for your sins,
And he is risen!

And in your baptism you have been united to him in his death and resurrection!

There he called you by name,
You encountered him,
And his Father became your Father,
His God,
Your God.

Did you hear that same theme in our Colossians reading...

You have been raised with Christ,
Your life is hidden in God,
You will be revealed with him in glory.

This is the new life of the resurrection,
Where sadness is turned to joy.

And it's all for you.

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CONCLUSION – recovery rates

For the foreseeable future our news will continue to have discussions of mortality rates,
And we pray for God's mercy on our world in the midst of this pandemic,
And that he would limit the loss of life.

But let us not forget,

That because the wages of sin is death,

left on our own,
none of us get out of here alive in the end,
the ultimate mortality rate is 100%.

But as Christ Jesus rose from the dead,
And as you are united to him,

Where fear is transformed to faith,
And sadness is transformed into joy,

He shares with you the new life of the resurrection,

And that too is 100% guaranteed for those who are baptized and believe in him.

If you've never known him,
Or if you wandered away from,

He asks you,
"Whom are you looking for?"

Is it him?

He's reaching out to you today to trust him.

God grant it, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Christ is risen! Alleulia!
He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

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BLESSING

The peace of God which passes all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds safe
in Christ Jesus, Amen.