

Matthew 28:1-10

Every Easter the empty tomb is proclaimed to churches that are filled with people. Except this year. Does this change the message of Easter? Absolutely not! Jesus' victory over sin, death, and the powers of hell is the glorious truth, and is for you, whether you are able to gather in God's house with fellow Christians, or in your house by yourself or with your family. Today is Easter whether it seems like it and feels like it, or not.

Look at our Easter Gospel with me. Does it feel like Easter to these women who come out to the tomb? Of course not! It feels like Good Friday to them. What happened on that sad day was death and separation, fear and isolation. For these women, and for Jesus' disciples, this would be the new normal. Jesus had clearly taught them that He would rise from the dead on the Third Day. But their faith did not grasp this. Their Jesus is now a dead Jesus. Their lasting memory is of His agonizing death on the cross.

Yet, despite how these women feel, it is not Good Friday any longer, but it is truly Easter. Their sadness and isolating fear cannot change the truth that Jesus has risen from the dead.

Good Friday and Easter are two sides of the same coin. Grab a quarter and look at it. You see two sides, and these two sides are very different from each other. Yet, you do not think that you have in your hand two coins, but just the one.

Good Friday and Easter are very different from each other. Yet, they are not two separate events. They are one event, one coin. How so? Because death must give way to resurrection. It is impossible for the Holy One to see corruption. The grave cannot keep Him within its grasp. What the prophets said all along...what Jesus said...must take place. The Son of man must die, and the Son of man must also rise from death.

When you flip a coin, you do not know which side will turn up. Statisticians tell us that you always have a fifty-fifty chance of the coin turning up heads. It seems, doesn't it, as if the Good Friday side of the coin has been turning up day in and day out for weeks now. We're living under a blanket of fear. Isolation and separation greet us each morning. Always, on Easter morning, the joyful, "He is risen!" side of the coin turns up. But this year we're not so sure.

Put yourself with these women on Easter morning. They surely thought that every day for the rest of their lives the Good Friday side of the coin would turn up. But what joy for them to hear that *death is swallowed up in victory!* "Come," says the angel, "*see the place where He lay.*" "*He has risen, as He said.*"

This same joyful news is for you. Whatever side of the coin you've been seeing, remember that Good Friday and Easter are inseparable. Jesus is risen no matter how you feel right now. He has won the victory over all your enemies even if your enemies appear to have the upper hand. Jesus defeated sin, death, and the devil, and He did it for you.

You confessed with me earlier that you are a poor, miserable sinner. Yes, this is true. But this is only one side of the coin. The word of absolution that I pronounced is for you. The Easter side of the coin proclaims Jesus who lives to silence all your fears, to wipe away your tears, to calm

your troubled heart, and His blessings to impart. And He has blessed you with your baptism into His death and resurrection. Both sides of the coin. Not just into His death, but also you are baptized into His resurrection. But your sins are not raised. They remain dead and buried in His tomb. Friend, you are forgiven.

And friend, Jesus' victory over death and the devil is for you. So many, sadly, see their hope of heaven as a fifty-fifty coin toss. This does not need to be you. For you know and believe, by God's grace, in the power of Jesus' resurrection. "*Jesus lives, your ever-living Head!*" And where the Head is, the body must follow.

You, dear baptized Christian, are the body of Christ. Now you live under the shadow of death, of the cross. Isolation and separation rule the day now. But look with these women into the empty tomb. The Good Friday side of the coin is no longer visible. It turns up heads, for Jesus, your living Head, has triumphed. Death cannot have you forever. Your sins cannot keep you out of heaven. And Satan has no say in it at all.

It's not fifty-fifty. It's not ninety-ten. Look at your baptism into Christ. Hear the message of the angel with these women. The coin is turned up heads. Easter rules the day now and forever. Amen.