

Mark 16:1-8

A brief glance at churches across the country this morning is proof positive that the Easter Bunny is no match for the Risen Lord. In Europe those who go to church one time within the year go on December 24. Christmas Eve, in Europe, packs in the people. But here in America it's Easter Sunday. The Easter Service is the one which draws the most people. The world has taken over Christmas, at least here in the U.S. It has taken over practically 51 Sundays out of the year. But Easter still belongs to the church, and it always will.

Little did those three women realize, as they were heading toward the tomb on the very first Easter morning, that what was about to take place would dramatically change not only their own lives, but the lives of people living 2,000 years later, and half-a-world away in a town called Augusta, Missouri. And your life has been changed because of Easter. Looking at these women it may be hard for us to believe that this is how it all began. There isn't one thing they did here that impresses us. They went to the tomb of Jesus in sadness. They were walking with their heads looking down for it says they looked up to see that the stone had been rolled away. Seeing the angel, the women became alarmed. Even upon hearing the news of the resurrection, they fled with trembling and astonishment, and they said nothing to anyone because they were afraid. This is hardly the kind of stuff which revolutions are made of. It's a little embarrassing for us in the church to admit to the world that our Easter Festival traces its roots back to three sad-looking women who did nothing but shake and tremble with fear.

But in the bigger picture, this embarrassing truth gives us tremendous hope. For in some ways the church today is as much a sad-looking spectacle as were these three women. If such great things can come from these women...and they did...then who are we to give up hope today! Even if most of the church's members say nothing to anyone about Jesus and the resurrection, as it is said here of these women; and even if most of us shake and tremble as they did, though not with fear as much as with anger and frustration because the church seems to be losing more souls than it's winning...if the Easter event can change the lives of millions upon millions of people over the course of 2,000 years...and it has...then for us in the church today as well, all things are possible.

And I'm not just speaking about the resurrection on the Last Day. Yes, Easter means that all who live and die in Jesus will be raised from their graves when time comes to an end. And that is worth singing about. It's worth our time to reflect on it not just one day of the year, but each and every day. But Easter means more than that. It means that since Jesus, who conquered death, will raise our bodies to life in the end, He also has the power to raise us from death to life right now.

The power of the living Lord can be vividly seen in the story I'm going to tell you. And if you want to hear more of this story, then speak to Rev. Wallace and Kathy Schulz because it took place while their son, Paul, was watching. Three witches came to the church in Africa where Anssi Simojoki, a Lutheran pastor, and Paul were working and teaching. They were there with a bag full of their witches paraphernalia--conjuring items--and they were going to curse the property. The power of hell was there within those three witches. Satan was working through them to destroy the Lutheran teaching in that area. Dr. Simojoki, a brave man, walked over to the witches and after twenty minutes came back and told Paul that the witches wanted to know when they could be baptized. In twenty minutes...twenty minutes of rebuking their errors and proclaiming the truth of Jesus Christ, God brought these women who were dead--dead in the kingdom of the devil to life in the kingdom of Christ. And then making a bonfire, Dr. Simojoki, as the group of Lutherans present sang hymns and prayed the Lord's Prayer, took the bag the witches had brought and threw it into the fire.

And if you don't think the same thing can happen here in Augusta, think again! Over the years the members of this congregation have witnessed the baptisms of hundreds of souls, and each one brought Easter from 2,000 years ago into the present day. The power of the resurrection which took place on Easter is happening today in Africa and right here in Augusta where God raises to life in Christ those who were spiritually dead in their sins and unbelief.

And this power of the resurrection is not just for others...it's for you. Easter took place for you. Holy Baptism is for you. The resurrected life in Jesus is for you. And there is not one of us here today who does not need the power of Jesus' resurrection--because we are just like the three women in our text. So often we walk through life as they did, with our heads down. So often, like them, we become alarmed over one thing after another. So often we tremble and shake as fear, or frustration, or anger grabs hold. And so often, like them, we say nothing to anyone about everything within us that is troubling our hearts.

And even knowing the truth of the resurrection, we still can live as though Easter does not have all that much meaning for us. Tomorrow, and next week, and next month some of us here--or maybe all of us--will act as though Jesus' resurrection is for everyone else except for me. It shows in how we live. We may not work against the church calling down curses upon the pastor and congregation as those witches were about to do, but we do live as though Jesus doesn't care what we say and do in life. We do live as though our Lord was more dead than alive.

Well, listen to the words of the angel: "He has risen...(and) He is going before you to Galilee." And I'm here to tell you today that Galilee is not half-a-world away; Galilee is right here in the water of Holy Baptism; Galilee is here in the bread and wine of Holy Communion, because as Jesus promised to meet His disciples in Galilee, so He promises to meet you here in these holy things.

The Risen Lord is here with you today. He who conquered death for you is here today to raise you from death to life. And not just in the end, but right now. And because you, like me, are a sinner who struggles with fears, who wrestles with doubts, who deals with troubles, who gives in to temptation day after day, and who needs a living Savior--needs His life and forgiveness--you need to go and meet your Lord in Galilee just as I do.

Three women in Jerusalem who once were sad and afraid, and three women in Africa who once were going to curse Jesus' church, met their living Lord in Galilee, and He changed them. He brought them out of their death into life, and they did become His witnesses. Today that life is for you. Maybe you're here just because it's Easter Sunday. Maybe you're here as a visitor. Maybe you come here faithfully. For whatever reason God has drawn you here, know this for certain...Jesus is for you. His death is for you. His resurrection is for you. His forgiveness is for you. Not sometime in the future, but now. Right now you have a living Lord! Right now he forgives all your sins. Right now he calls to you to meet Him at Galilee. Right now he gives you life--His life--a life that will never, ever come to an end. Amen.