

Sermon – April 9, 2023 - The Resurrection of Our Lord: Easter Day Pastor Ventura

The Tomb is Empty!

Matthew 28:1–10

Dear Friends in Christ

Alleluia, Christ is Risen, he is risen indeed, alleluia!

You probably know that for centuries on this day it has been the tradition for the Christian Church to shout this exclamation on Easter Sunday, Alleluia, Christ is Risen... He is risen indeed, Alleluia. We believe it, we see it, we embrace it, alleluia, Christ is Risen. He is risen indeed, alleluia! “And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone...” The stone that was keeping Jesus in the grave has been rolled away. Now the tomb is empty. He is not there. Christ, the King is risen.

And we are thrilled to be here this morning! This is a day, the day the Lord has made in which we can rejoice and let our alleluias roll out of our tongues and be heard!

Although, even as we gather and rejoice today, let’s step back from the exuberance and the delight for a moment, and face a hard fact, that unlike every other so-called religion, the Christian faith is subject to being proved wrong. Hinduism views the entire universe as God's and everything in the universe as God. And it believes that each person is intrinsically divine, and the purpose of life is to seek and realize the divinity within all of us. In other words, the power to be good comes from within the person. Buddhism—Gautama Buddha lived—we’re sure of that—but then in the year 483 B.C. he died. And according to Buddhism teaching, “with that utter passing away in which nothing whatever remains behind.” There is not more Buddha. Islam—a very historic religion. We know, or at least we have heard about Muhammad’s life and teaching, even though he claimed to be a prophet of God, well, he too died in the year 632 A.D.

But Christianity, well we know Jesus was buried but on the third day he resurrected. The tomb is empty, and more, Jesus’ resurrection is central to our faith. As one of the New Testament writers, Paul, says: “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.” (1 Cor 15:17).

The foundation then of the Christian faith is not the behavior or the works of

Christians. Rather the foundation of our faith is what we celebrate at Easter. Jesus is alive, he is risen. Alleluia, Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed.

And when we say that Christ is risen, we're not just saying he's alive in some spiritual sense. He is alive, Christ is alive! In the flesh! Mary Magdalene and the other Mary took hold of Jesus' feet, his *physical* feet! Physical bodies have feet, to which the women clung. This Jesus was no apparition! It was Jesus himself.

But if he is alive, then that means one thing, the tomb is empty! I'm not sure about you, but I don't like the word "Empty!"

I suppose the word can be used in positive way too, but "empty" is something we don't like. My car gas tank is empty. The grocery store shelves are empty, that gave us some panic attacks a couple of years ago, didn't it. My bank account is empty. The fridge is empty, and no you don't want to be near me when I'm hungry.... So, being empty is not good. And if we want to go deeper, think of our physical well beings, my energy tank is empty, my brain is empty. And the biggest one, I'm empty emotionally.

It's likely you have felt "empty" at some point in your life – or perhaps you've heard someone else describe themselves in that way. Some describe their emptiness as being "a kind of bottomless jug that can never be filled." Someone wrote: "When you feel like everything you do is pointless and you're just going through the motions. Just trying to fill in the time until you die. Sometimes you have fun or something good happens which can distract you for a while, but ultimately there is a hollowness inside which never goes away. It's as if you're transparent and anything positive like love or joy just passes right through you without sticking and afterwards it feels like it was never there at all." And still other person wrote: "It felt as though I wasn't fully part of the world, I couldn't feel anything and nothing I did made an impact on events or other people, I 'existed' but I wasn't 'alive'." Do these statements describe someone here today? Being emotionally empty is not a good thing, and so hearing about an empty tomb doesn't give us, our critics an assurance, does it.

All throughout history there have been sceptics that doubt profoundly even the existence of Jesus because the tomb is empty. It is difficult to prove the existence of Jesus with an empty tomb. There are no remains to be able to get some DNA evidence or something, that can make people say, yes! he existed! We know where he is buried!

With an empty tomb it is difficult to believe.

But for the Christian, and for all really, having an empty tomb is good news. It is good news because our Savior is alive. All that what was said about him in the Old Testament, and all what Jesus said of himself came to pass. So having an empty tomb is good news for us, because of what he came to do for us.

He came to deal with our sins, he came to give us hope, he came to fill our empty lives, and he came to bring us life eternal.

Yes, he came to deal with our sins. In our culture today we often hear that it is kind of politically incorrectness to talk about sin, we can talk about choices or bad decisions, but sins? And it may be politically incorrect, but the reality is that we have a holy, righteous and perfect God. And anytime we don't live up to his standards, we fall short and what the Bible calls sin. And when we sin, not only we are liable of its consequences here on earth, but the most horrendous consequence is an internal condemnation. Sin has corrupted our nature, that keeps us away from God. But there is nothing we can do about that, except Jesus, who on the cross paid for all those sins. Taking our place, he endured the consequence of our sins on his holy body, he experienced even death in our stead, in our place, but in doing so, He has freed us from the clows of death, he has rescued us from the slavery of sin, and allowed us to be restored in our relationship with God, and more, to live with God for ever.

“Greetings” he tells the women, a true sign that all is good between God and them. That God has forgiven their sins, and they are now at peace with him. Greetings he tells us. You are forgiven! You have peace!

Jesus came to give us hope. Sin does rob us of true hope. And when there is no hope, there is emptiness. Emotional and spiritual emptiness, nothing that the world offers can fill that emptiness, that's when hope then gets sucked out from us.

O sure, that happens for those outside of the church, right? Sure, it does! But it also happens to those who have confessed the Christian faith. Sin somehow wants to keep us slaves, sure Jesus removes from the slavery of sin, but somehow slavery wants to remain in us, after all we are still in the flesh. But as he fills our lives, as he fills our emptiness true hope sprouts in our hearts, but first he tells us “Do not be afraid.” For future is already written. It belongs to Jesus. He is risen; so shall we arise on the

day of His return.

Indeed, he came to fill our lives. The good News of Easter is that the tomb is empty, and that means that Jesus is alive and that he comes to fill our hearts. If he stayed in the tomb, that would mean we would continue with empty lives. But for our benefit Jesus resurrected, the empty tomb means full lives for us. Full lives here and complete wholesome eternal lives in heaven, for those who have died in Christ.

But for that to happen the Scriptures tell us that Jesus had to empty himself. He “made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” Paul tells in Philippians 2:7. In the original Greek language, the word for “made himself nothing” means to become empty. In this case, Jesus emptied himself of his heavenly glory, of his powers as God, and his independent authority. Jesus did not cease to be God during His earthly ministry but submitted to the will of the Father. He did so, so that he could fill the emptiness we face in life. But his becoming nothing, his emptying of himself, rendered victory of death itself upon his resurrection. And that victory means life eternal for us.

Thus, the resurrection of Jesus is the declaration of victory over the terrible power of death. As the stone that locked his dead body in the tomb, which reminds us of the awful finality of death itself, and nobody can do anything about it, was removed, shows us that Jesus, that Jesus is the author of life. And reminds us that the power that has held us ransom has been overthrown; the dark cloud that has brooded over our lives, robbing us of hope, leaving us empty, has been removed. With Paul, we can mock the former lord of the world by saying: "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

But not only his resurrection is the victory that gives us life, but he himself is in fact our resurrection and our life.

One day, Jesus gets a word from some very close friends, Mary and Martha, that Lazarus their brother, was sick and about to die and requested that Jesus would come to see him, but as we heard a few Sundays ago, he delays. Only after Lazarus dies and has been buried for a few days, is that Jesus shows up.

You remember this story? Mary and Martha come out to meet Jesus, they sort of complain about his delay saying: "Jesus, if you had been here, my brother would not

have died." In other words, "Jesus, you were late. Jesus, you did not answer our prayer. Jesus, you're making it very difficult for us to believe." Jesus, we are empty of hope, we are running empty. And what Jesus says next is extraordinary. He doesn't give them explanations of what life after death is like. Or that there is a resurrection. Instead, Jesus tells them: "I am the Resurrection and the Life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live." He, dear friends is himself our resurrection and our life. Alleluia Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

The tomb is empty, while empty is not always a good statement, here for us "the tomb is empty" is indeed a wonderful statement. For Christ is not buried, Christ is alive, and is with us today, here and now.

He will never leave or forsake us. He is always working in all things to bring about good to those who love God. He is with us in our brokenness, in our emptiness, in our lack of hope, in our despair. Even in our dying, for we know he is our resurrection. And even when we find ourselves empty, all over again, we know where we can get full again, here, in the forgiveness of our sins, in the bread and the cup, here at the altar, for he is here today and always. Here we are not only nourished in the faith, and in our spirits, but here we are receiving his victory, his resurrection victory!

And like the women who were given the news of the resurrection in the first place, we too are sent to share the joy that the empty tomb brings into our hearts.

We are sent with exuberant joy, after all we are forgiven, we are made alive, we are given hope, and like the Mary's that morning, we too touch in adoration and worship the body and blood of Jesus.

Our lives are full this Easter Day, the message is great, the cross was for you. The empty tomb was for you, and for those who share the Gospel with.

Alleluia, Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia. What a joy to be here today. This is the Lord's victory.

In His name, amen!