

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Festival of the Resurrection of Our Lord
March 31, 2024
Sermon by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz
What did you expect?

—Mark 16:1-8

Our Festival of the Resurrection of Our Lord today is a joyful celebration of Jesus' victory over death. We sing our praises. We declare Jesus' victory. Today is the climax of the Christian Church Year, when we celebrate the ultimate victory over death. The first Easter was not that way. It could have been. It should have been. But the first Easter, the first glimpses of the empty tomb, was more about fear and doubt and bewilderment and uncertainty and confusion. Those were the emotions that marked the first Easter morning for the women, for the disciples. It was only as the day went on and the once-crucified Jesus showed himself to be very much alive that doubt gave way to belief and gloom yielded to overwhelming joy.

Ask any of the women making their way to the tomb, "What did you expect?" and they would have given you the same answer. The women went to the tomb expecting to find a corpse. They went shopping after the Sabbath to buy spices to anoint the dead body of their teacher and friend. It seems their grief must have clouded their judgment somewhat, since it's only on the way to the garden that they realize that someone is going to have to help them get the stone out of the way, so they can get inside. Nevertheless, paying respects to a dead Jesus was the only thing on their mind that early morning.

Until they arrived. The tomb was open. The stone is rolled away—that's convenient! And inside there is a visitor who has already gotten to the tomb first, a young man in a white robe seated on the right side. He says, "You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"

Just as he told you! It didn't have to be a morning of fear and gloom because Jesus had told his followers that he would rise, and they would see him alive again. The angel could have asked, "What did you expect? Weren't you paying attention to what Jesus said?" Up north, before they had come to Jerusalem, Jesus told his disciples, "We are going to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, but three days after he is killed, he will rise" (Mark 9:31). The first time Jesus tells his disciples this, Peter takes him aside and says, "No, Lord this shall never happen to you!" and Jesus responds by saying to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the things of God but the things of men" (Matthew 16). So Jesus tells his disciples again: Betrayal, crucifixion, rising on the third day. And again. And again. He makes the point repeatedly for emphasis, telling everyone *exactly* what is going to happen.

So ladies, what did you expect? Did you really expect Jesus to still be dead after he said over and over again that he would rise? Disciples, what did you expect? Did you really think that Jesus' words meant nothing? Did you think he wasn't serious when he told you what would happen? Really, what did you expect, that Jesus is a liar? That he couldn't deliver?

Well, he did deliver. Jesus really did rise on the third day. The resurrection is a reality! Jesus cannot lie because he is God, and God cannot lie. Jesus' coming back from the dead on the third day confirms who he is—the very Son of God who walked among us—and the resurrection reality confirms that Jesus did everything he came to do and everything he said he would do. He suffered and died on a tree—just as he said. He poured out his blood for the sin of the world—just as he said. He cried out, "It is finished," and the world's debt of sin was paid in full—just as he said. And on the third day he rose from the dead—just as he said—to declare that atonement was made, death is conquered, sins are forgiven, heaven is open to all believers. Jesus lives! It all happened just as he said. What did you expect? When Jesus speaks a word of promise it is as good as done because he always delivers on what he says.

The word of some people means nothing. We know all about broken promises. "I promise I'll pay you back on Tuesday"—yeah, right! Kids, we'll go to the park right after work—oh, so sorry, something came up. The fact that some words mean nothing is a lesson that many children sadly learn early in the home. There are parents who promise or threaten but never follow through. "If you don't turn off that video game right now and do your homework, you're going to be grounded for a week." They keep playing, and nothing happens. "No, I'm serious! Listen to me when I'm talking to you! If you don't shape up, you're going to be in big trouble!" Unnecessary yelling, idle threats—but no follow-through. Kids learn in that environment that parents' words mean nothing. And if the words of earthly authority mean nothing, maybe God's words mean nothing. Except God's words don't mean nothing.

I'm afraid that on the Last Day there are going to be a whole lot of people who hear the dreadful words from the Judge, Jesus Christ, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." And they will say, "What? When you said that the sexually immoral, and the greedy, and the idolaters, and the slanderers will not inherit the kingdom of God, I didn't think you were serious. When you said that the cowardly, the vile, the unbelieving, the liars will be thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, I didn't think you really meant it. Jesus, when you said those words, 'Unless you repent, you too will perish,' I didn't think you meant *me*. When you said through the inspired writer in your holy Word, 'If you deliberately go on sinning after you have received the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God,' (Hebrews 10:26) I thought that I was the exception—because I went to Lutheran schools and sat in Lutheran pews." Well, what did you expect? Did you think that Jesus, the risen Christ, was just kidding? That he wasn't serious? That he's a liar?" For every single soul who perishes in eternal fire, the same question could be asked, "What did you expect?" You knew you broke God's law, you knew you sinned, and you treated with contempt and indifference the only person who could save you by his life, death and resurrection—Jesus Christ! How tragic it truly is when the reality of the resurrection falls on deaf ears and hard hearts. Jesus *is* victorious! He *is* the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He *will* come to judge the living and the dead. We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

What did you expect? Jesus tells us how it will be. Jesus *always* keeps his word!

The reality of the resurrection—that fact that Jesus did rise from the dead, validating himself as the only Savior of the world—is why for a Christian repentance is a whole-life, every-day thing—confessing and turning away from sin and turning to Jesus for forgiveness. Jesus lives! He is your Lord and Savior, the destroyer of death, the bringer of forgiveness, the one who has the power to cancel your sin and deliver eternal life. That's why we live each day in the power of our Baptism and remember that in Baptism the old sinful nature was drowned and put to death, as we were made alive with Christ. That's why we're so hungry and thirsty for the righteousness Jesus gives us in Holy Communion. The Lord's Supper refreshes us, strengthens us, gives us Jesus' forgiveness; it's food for our souls. That's why we love God's Word, because it's a lamp for our feet and a light for our path. It keeps us on the straight, narrow path, it calls us back when we stray, and it refreshes us with the good news of Jesus, our risen Savior and Good Shepherd. Through these Means of Grace we are comforted and fed and forgiven and encouraged. The Holy Spirit lives in you and empowers you to walk with Jesus, to keep your eyes fixed on him, to be faithful even to the point of death. Then Jesus promises you the crown of life, and Jesus always keeps his word!

And when you finally get to heaven, just as Jesus promised—when on the Last Day Jesus summons all the dead, great and small; and you stand before the Judge dressed in perfection purchased for you by the Judge himself; and you hear him say, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world;" and you stand there surrounded by all the other Christians who have come from the far reaches of the planet, a multitude from every nation, tribe, language and people, more than anyone can count; and you are overwhelmed by the beauty and the glory and the perfection of your surroundings—well, what did you expect? What did you expect from your Savior, who said, "I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me, so that you also may be where I am" (John 14:2,3)? When you look around you in amazement, and you realize you are in the presence of Jesus; and you're reunited with your loved ones who fell asleep in Jesus before you; and you try to grasp the reality of your own resurrection to eternal life, and you remember the words you confessed again and again, "And his kingdom will have no end;" and you realize that because of the reality of the resurrection you are going to bask in perfect splendor, in perfect fulfillment and bliss, in perfect communion with God for ever and ever—well, what did you expect? What did you expect that the blood of Jesus would buy for you? What did you expect could be purchased and attained through the shedding of the perfect, innocent blood of Jesus, blood of infinite worth, to wash away all sin and restore life and immortality? What did you expect that Jesus, with his perfect, righteous fulfillment of God's law, would achieve for you? What did you expect the kingdom of God would be like, when the ticket price for entry was paid only and exclusively by God himself?

On this Easter Sunday we celebrate the reality of Jesus' resurrection. Jesus said it would be this way. In the power of Christ's forgiveness and victory, we look forward to the reality of *our* resurrection from the dead and entrance into the life of the world to come. Jesus says it *will* be this way. And Jesus always keeps his word! Amen.