

All or Nothing

Mark 16:1-8 When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ² And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³ And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" ⁴ And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back- it was very large. ⁵ And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. ⁶ And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you." ⁸ And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 There have been other resurrections. Elijah raised the son of the widow from Zarephath. Elisha raised the son of the Shunammite woman. The dead man whose body touched Elisha's bones rose back to life. Jesus raised the daughter of Jauris, the son of the widow of Nain, and Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha. Peter raised Tabitha. And when Paul preached so long that the young man Eutyches fell asleep and fell out of a third-story window and died, Paul raised him from the dead and went back to finish the sermon. So why make such a big fuss out of a resurrection?

2 The resurrection of Jesus, however, was different. It was different because His death was different. For everyone else, death is expected. Even when death comes tragically or at an unexpected time, it's not that the death was unexpected. All people will die. Death is the way of things; it's the consequence of sin. All sinners can expect to die. But not Jesus. He is the sinless Son of God, the only One for whom death was not the final reality. And yet, when He was born with human flesh it was precisely for the purpose of dying a human death. At His Baptism in the Jordan River, this Christ stood in the place of sinners, subjected Himself to a baptism for repentance even when He had nothing of which to repent. And then, on the cross, he stood finally in the place of sinners. Bearing the sin of all humanity, he died in the place of sinful humanity.

3 The death of Jesus was different from any other death, so His resurrection was different from any other resurrection. No one else who was raised from the dead is still alive. Even Lazarus, called forth from the tomb by the Lord himself would be placed back into the tomb after he died again. But you just confessed with the Church throughout all history that Jesus' resurrection is permanent: "He rose again according to the Scriptures and ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father." Still alive. His resurrection was unlike any before.

4 But the resurrection of Jesus is not completely unique. He is the firstborn from the dead, but not the last. His resurrection is unlike the others recorded in sacred Scriptures because you're involved in it. In the waters of Holy Baptism, you were joined to Christ's crucifixion, St. Paul says. "You were buried with Christ through baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ has been raised from the dead by the glory of the Father," so will you be. In Holy Baptism, you were joined into this reality we celebrate at Easter. Jesus rose from the dead. You share in His resurrection, too, beloved. You, too, will rise!

5 If Christ has not been raised from the dead, your faith is meaningless, worthless, empty. If Christ has not been raised from the dead, you're wasting your time here. If Christ has not been raised from the dead, go home. If Christ has not been raised from the dead, Christianity is no different from every other man-made religion. But if Christ has been raised from the dead, that changes everything. It changes everything, and it changes you. It leaves no room for middle-ground. It leaves no provision for half-heartedness. It permits no lukewarm Christianity. It's all or nothing, no in-between.

6 If Christ has been raised from the dead, the world is different. So repent of supposing that the resurrection of Christ is an insipid, innocuous proposition that you may calmly contemplate. Repent of treating the news of Christ's death and resurrection as just another commonplace bit of information. Repent of supposing that Christ's resurrection does not change the very nature of your life. Christ has been raised from the dead, and nothing can ever be the same.

7 When the sinless Son of God paid sin's penalty, when He died as the consequence not for His own sin but for yours, death was already undone. Already on Good Friday, Easter's celebration was unavoidable. The Lord Jesus died in the place of sinners, so death was rendered powerless. The death of Jesus in your place meant the death of death itself. All of the devil's accusations against you are silenced because Jesus died in your place. And the power of sin to hold you captive is shattered by the One who was held captive by sin in your stead. Everything is changed. Jesus' resurrection is proof of the devil's demise, proof of sin's subduing, proof of death's defeat.

8 This changes everything. No longer is your life a hopeless progression toward death. Christ has claimed you completely as His own through the waters of Holy Baptism. Those who have died with Christ in Baptism will certainly rise with Him. As certainly as Christ rose from the dead, you will rise. This changes everything. It changes who you are. Now you belong to the Lord, the Resurrected One. He has placed His

very name upon you. It changes how you live. No longer need you live in fear of God's wrath and eternal punishment. Because Christ has endured these in your place, because He has taken what you deserve, you receive His reward. The death and resurrection of Jesus changes everything.

9 The same Crucified and Risen Lord whose life, death, and resurrection change the very shape and pattern of your life, meets you today in His Supper. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary left the tomb not having beheld what you are about to see: the very Body and Blood of the Resurrected Christ. Here, at this altar, this Supper changes everything. This Body and Blood of the Resurrected Lord is the medicine of immortality. It is the proof that you, too, will rise. Death is rendered powerless. Death is dead and Jesus is alive.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

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Easter Day, A✠D 2008