

Easter Dawn, A ✕ D 2010
John 20:1-18

In the Name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

1 There's a remarkable specificity to all of Easter. It began when Jesus set His face toward Jerusalem, fixating Himself on that specific city for a specific purpose. Jesus was crucified not under any Roman procurator but under Pontius Pilate. They beat Him and led Him outside the city to a specific place, the Place of the Skull, Golgotha, a specific hill, Calvary. There they crucified Him. And then they took His dead body and placed it in a grave, not just any grave, mind you, but a specific one, a fresh-hewn grave that belonged to Joseph of Arimathea. Then on a specific morning, Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene and the other women went to the tomb, that specific tomb, to anoint the dead body of the Son of God with spices.

2 The specificity goes way back before that. While Quirinius was governor of Syria, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. Specific time and place. The angel Gabriel had appeared to a specific woman, Mary, to announce to her that she would conceive miraculously and give birth miraculously to the Son of God. So her betrothed, a descendant of David, took her and the yet unborn Son of God and Son of Mary to Bethlehem, the city of David. Specific people, specific times, specific places. And all of this specific intervention of God into time, His taking human flesh in the Virgin's womb, His being born, was for the specific purpose of His crucifixion.

3 Everything has a place. The risen Christ rose from a specific grave, appeared to specific people, instituted very specific ways the forgiveness He won on the cross would get given out, sent specific men, established His Church specifically on the basis of His crucifixion and resurrection. The resurrected Christ continues to work, to intervene in His creation, but only through specific ways and places. Nowhere else but in His Church does God promise to meet us. Nowhere else but in His Church does God offer salvation. Nowhere else. Which is why you're here.

4 Nowhere else is your problem rightly identified. Other people and places may try. Dr. Phil and Oprah have their theories about what ails you. Infomercials will identify new and endless problems that this-new-remedy will address. Self-help books have advice aplenty. Doctors will prescribe and incise to cut away or treat away the problem. There are lots of diagnosable symptoms, but only one root problem: sin. Sin causes all your problems. The wages of sin is death. Sin and death go hand-in-hand. Sin is rebellion against God, who is the source of life. Sin is turning toward death both temporally and eternally. Sin naturally, then, means death. And so sin and death are your chief problems.

5 Death is the world's biggest fear. Industries that can make you look younger, that can mask the effects of aging and impending death, make billions of dollars a year. Gone are the days when people wanted to die slowly so that they might have time to prepare for their passing. Now people want to die unexpectedly in their sleep. Why? Because they fear death. Because death is the concern, the problem. And nowhere else is your fear dealt with.

6 Because sin is the problem, because every sin, every transgression of the commandments, is ultimately rebellion against God, a transgression of the First

Commandment, nowhere else is repentance required. Godly sorrow over your sin is the prerequisite for even being here. Sure, there will be impostors, those who presume to come merely to satisfy some sense of obligation or familial duty. But they will not receive the gifts the Resurrected Lord comes to lavish for their benefit. You cannot hide your hypocrisy from God who sees everything. He sees right down to your heart. He knows your intentions and your motivations better than you do. Have you been disobedient, unfaithful, or lazy? Have you been hot-tempered, rude, or quarrelsome? Have you hurt someone by your words or deeds? Have you stolen, been negligent, or done any harm? Have your thoughts been as crystal clean as your actions? Have you loved God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength? Repent; that is what is required: here and nowhere else.

7 Repentance is not the end. The gift from God of sorrow over your sins has a purpose: to make you ready for the greater gift of forgiveness. Nowhere else than in Christ's Church are your sins forgiven. If sin is the problem, rejoice, because Jesus gives you a solution. His specific life, death, and resurrection were for this purpose alone: to take your sins away. On the cross, Jesus endured the full fury of God's wrath for sinners and their sin. Nowhere else is there full forgiveness of sins. Not partial forgiveness; full forgiveness. Nowhere else does the Crucified and Risen Jesus deliver the full forgiveness of sins than in His Church.

8 Nowhere else but in the Lord's Church is everything free. There is nothing here to earn. You don't need to tidy yourself up to be ready for God's gift of forgiveness. The gift does that. Forgiveness comes to the unworthy, to those who least deserve it, to those who most need it, to the repentant. Nowhere else is everything free.

9 Nowhere else does Jesus promise to do His work of forgiving sins. Nowhere else are sins washed away except in the font of Holy Baptism. Nowhere else has He promised to make disciples than in the water joined with His word in Baptism. And nowhere else has the Creator of the universe claimed you—specifically you—to belong to Him; nowhere else has the only true God placed His holy, triune name upon you than in the water of Baptism. And nowhere else has the specific death and resurrection of the Son of God been given to you—do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ were baptized into His death...if we were buried with Him through Baptism into death, we will certainly also be united with Him in a resurrection like His—than in the waters of Baptism. Nowhere else.

10 Nowhere else does Jesus send ministers to speak His words of Holy Absolution. Nowhere else is the devil beaten by a word of forgiveness. Nowhere else can your ears hear the healing comfort of Jesus' "I forgive you" that in Holy Absolution.

11 Nowhere else does Jesus give you His resurrected Body and Blood. Nowhere else is the true Body of Him who left the grave behind given to you. Nowhere else is the Blood shed for you given to you for the forgiveness of sins than in at the Lord's Altar. Nowhere else is death defeated than here. Nowhere else is the grave left powerless and broken. Nowhere else is your biggest need to be delivered from sin and death met than where Jesus meets you in His Service. Nowhere else is resurrection guaranteed. Nowhere else is there hope than where the risen Jesus is for you: here.

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Pastor Jeff Hemmer