

**Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!**

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

***“When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint [Jesus]. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb”*** (Mark 16:1-2).

When Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome arose on that Easter morning, it was dark, it was very dark. It was not just the darkness of night, but the darkness of their hearts. They did not come to the tomb, because they believed Jesus was alive. They came to the tomb, because they believed Jesus was dead. They did not believe Jesus was going to rise from the dead.

One week ago, they saw Jesus enter Jerusalem to the shouts of ***“Hosanna.”*** Jesus was adored by the crowds as they laid palm branches before Him. Jesus had a king’s welcome. But now just mere days later, those shouts changed from ***“Hosanna”*** to ***“Crucify Him!”*** Jesus went from adoration to hate as He was arrested, mocked, spit upon, flogged, crucified, and killed.

All was dim and dark for the Marys and Salome. They hoped that Jesus was the promised Messiah, but now His body lays dead, sealed in a tomb.

It was even darker for the Apostles. They are not just sad, but they are hiding and afraid inside a sealed upper room. They are full of fear thinking that they could have the same fate as Jesus.

But as the Marys and Salome were preparing the spices to anoint Jesus’ body and the Apostles were in hiding behind locked doors, God was working salvation amid all this suffering and fear. Even for you and me, when you think that all is lost and God isn’t working when you are suffering, believe me, He is.

Throughout the Old Testament times, there are numerous instances of God’s work of salvation being completed in the night and made visible in the morning.

In 1 Samuel 5, the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant, and they brought it to the people of Ashdod. The Ark was brought into the house of their false god Dagon and set it up beside Dagon. When the people of Ashdod rose early in the morning, they found that their false god Dagon had fallen down onto the ground before the Ark of the Covenant. So, naturally, they picked up Dagon and put him back in his place. That next morning, when they rose from sleep, Dagon was once again on the ground before the Ark, but this time the head of Dagon and both his hands were cut off.

In Isaiah 37, while at night, Hezekiah is rescued from the Assyrians after the Angel of the Lord strikes down 185,000 soldiers in their camp. The evidence of this is noticed when the people of God arose early in the morning to see those 185,000 dead soldiers (Isaiah 37:36).

In Daniel 6, for not giving up his faith in Yahweh, Daniel is sealed into the lions' den overnight for certain death. ***“Then, at break of day, [King Darius] arose and went in haste to the den of lions”*** (Daniel 6:19). To his relief, Daniel is alive.

In Judges 6, at night and at God's command, Gideon pulls down the altar of Baal and the altar of Asherah. The evidence is revealed ***“when the men of the town rose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was broken down, and the Asherah beside it was cut down”*** (Judges 6:28).

God is working salvation even when we don't notice it. In these cases, He was working salvation while everyone is sleeping. He does this so, ***“[we] will sing of Your strength; [so we] will sing aloud of Your steadfast love in the morning”*** (Psalm 59:16).

While at night, sealed in that tomb, Christ the Crucified rose from the dead and declared His victory over the power of sin, eternal death, and hell. He, in fact, put on a victory parade as He descended into hell as ***“He went and proclaimed [His victory] to the spirits in prison”*** (1 Peter 3:19). **Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!**

A lot was happening when nobody noticed. God has a way on giving us His steadfast love, even when we don't even ask for it. We never asked to be saved, even though we needed to be saved. Our sinful nature believes that all is well without God. Our sinful nature believes that you have earned what you have. In fact, all that we have is God's daily bread given to you – your food, clothing, shelter, good government, and the like.

But God doesn't stop there, yes, He gives us all we need for our temporal life now, but He created us to live forever in His love.

Through deceit, Satan, in the form of a serpent, convinced Adam and Eve to question God's love for them and instead follow Satan's lies. Satan's lies are still being listened to as they are the wisdom of the world: "Did God really say?" "If God really loved you, He would let you do whatever you want!"

Satan led humanity into loving vice – *pride, envy, gluttony, lust, greed, wrath, laziness* – and abhorring virtue – *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control* (Galatians 5:19-24).

But God the Father loves us. He loves us so much that He sent His only-begotten Son to suffer the death we all deserve – *death by crucifixion* – in order to save us from His wrath and from the powers of sin, eternal death, and the devil.

So, while we were all unaware of all that was happening between the body of Jesus being laid in the tomb through that glorious Easter morning, our salvation was being procured. Then when those Marys and Salome came with their spices, even if they did not understand, their joy came in the morning. Salvation was visible that morning, even if they didn't notice it – at first.

***“And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. 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’”*** (Mark 16:5-6).

***Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!*** Salvation is revealed with the morning! But there is something worth noting here with these words from the angel. The angel's words are really conveying that Jesus remains the Crucified One – for it is only through the crucifixion that salvation comes. So, this should really be rendered as “Jesus who is – *and remains* – crucified.”

However, on this Resurrection of Our Lord Day, you may still have another question lingering. Mark's Gospel suggests that Jesus did not arise at sunrise, but likely in the darkness of night, before the dawn. This should raise the question: What about Jesus saying He would rise on the third day?

Well, in those days, days were counted inclusively. So, according to the Jewish reckoning of time, the events before sundown on Good Friday were still on the day that had begun at sundown Thursday. So, sundown Friday through sundown Saturday was the Sabbath. Then the first day of the week began at sundown Saturday. These constituted the “three days.”

But our text from Mark 16, suggests that Jesus did arise at night, either on the Sabbath or after the start of the day after the Sabbath, but no matter what, the evidence of His victory over death is still the same: “***very early on the first day of the week***” (Mark 16:2). The evidence is still the same, and this is why we celebrate the Resurrection of Our Lord on Sundays, which is the first day of the week, the eighth day of creation, the day of our justification.

But there is still something rather odd about Mark’s resurrection account. Yes, we have Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome. We have the empty tomb. We have the angel giving the women the duty of telling this good news to Peter and the other apostles. Who is missing? Jesus. There is no sighting of Jesus. But through the words of that angel, we have the gospel: “***Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified One. He has risen; He is not here***” (Mark 16:6). This angel, this messenger of God, is the messenger of Good News. Our sinful minds try to reason things out and to see if Jesus is truly risen from the dead. But it is only faith in the crucified and risen Jesus that calms our doubts and fears. The Resurrection is a matter of faith. It’s a matter of trusting God and His Word. So, we must repent of our unbelief.

Jesus knows that we need His physical presence as well. ***And*** He will make His resurrection appearance next week to the apostles in the locked upper room. But we want Him too! And He does come to us. His grace, mercy, and forgiveness come to us where He said He would be present: in His Word and Sacraments.

The very work of the crucifixion, the payment for sins, comes to us through His holy Supper. Here, He appears to you in this Easter celebration, in His Word, and in His very body and blood. Through faith, that is, trust in His Word, we receive Him into our presence and enjoy the forgiveness of sins. There, in lowly bread and wine, you see Jesus and you hold Jesus, just as He told you! Salvation comes in the morning! ***Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed, alleluia!*** Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen. + **SOLI DEO GLORIA** +