

# THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD

## “Easter: An Alternate History”

*“If Christ has not been raised...” 1 Corinthians 15:14*

### **Imagine a world in which Christ was not raised.**

The Sabbath is past. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome have bought spices, so that they might go and anoint Jesus' body. And very early on the first day of the week, they go to the tomb. They say to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” And looking up, they see that the stone is right where it had been two days before. They also see a Roman soldier standing on the right side. He says to them, “Do not come any closer. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is dead; He is still here. See the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples they're next. When we find them, they will join Him, just as He said.” And they flee from the tomb, saying nothing to anyone, for they are afraid (cf. Mk. 16:1-8).

They're afraid for the rest of their lives. Jesus never appears to Mary in the garden, calling her by name (cf. John 20:14, 16). Well beyond the evening of that day, the disciples remain behind locked doors for fear of the Jews (cf. John 20:19). The two disciples on the road to Emmaus make their sad journey without incident, going to bed mournful that night. The Eleven soon leave the city and return to their old lives as fishermen and tax collectors. They deny ever having known Jesus, Peter in particular continuing to invoke curses on himself and swearing, “I *never* knew the man!” (cf. Matt. 26:74). They live long lives and die natural deaths. They never preach or teach or write letters or gospels. They do all that they can to forget the past.

And that's exactly where Christianity stays: in the past. Jesus is labelled another false Messiah, like Thaddeus or Judas the Galilean, men who rose up, claiming to be somebody, but they were killed, and all who followed them were dispersed and came to nothing (cf. vv. 36-37). And so it goes with the church. There *are* no churches, no gatherings, no breaking of the bread, no prayers. Jesus' followers are dispersed, and the whole thing comes to nothing.

Which means we're not here right now. There is no Our Redeemer Lutheran Church. There *are* no Lutherans, or Christians of *any* kind. I'm not a pastor, and you're not parishioners. We're just lost and condemned people, living our lives in utter despair, without hope.

“For if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain” (1 Cor. 15:14). What is preaching but a proclamation of Jesus' victory over sin, death, and the devil? But if Christ was not raised, then that victory never happened. The

cross was a *defeat*, and your faith in the person and work of Christ is as empty as the tomb is full.

You are “still in your sins” (1 Cor. 15:17). No resurrection, no forgiveness. Remember when Jesus said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven” (Mk. 2:5)? Well, if Christ was not raised, then He *lied*. The scribes were *right* to question in their hearts, since He clearly did *not* have authority on earth to forgive sins. His rotting corpse in the grave is proof. He neither bore your griefs nor carried your sorrows. They are still on *you*, and you alone must find a way to pay for them.

“Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished” (1 Cor. 15:18). No forgiveness means no life everlasting, no resurrection of the dead. Everyone whom you have ever loved and lost is gone. You’ll never see them again. They have *perished*. And such is your fate, as well. Jesus may have *said*, “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25), but if He was not raised, then what hope do *we* have of life after death? We are of all people most to be pitied.

Or, we *would* be, if any of that were true.

### **But in fact Christ *has* been raised from the dead.**

When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. And they were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. 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. 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.”

And although they went out and fled from the tomb and said nothing to anyone *at first*, they did say something *eventually* (Matt. 28:8). Mary Magdalene, who saw the risen Jesus, announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord” (John 20:18). On the evening of that day, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you” (John 20:19). Then the disciples were glad. He later joined those who were on the road to Emmaus and revealed Himself to them in the Scriptures and in the breaking of the bread. The Eleven, emboldened by seeing their Lord alive, and later by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, soon left their old lives behind, preaching and teaching, writing letters and gospels, and suffering all, even early and violent deaths, for His name’s sake.

They gave everything to be God's instruments and go and make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19).

And that's exactly where Christianity went. Before ascending into heaven, Jesus told His disciples, "You will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). And they were. They proclaimed Jesus' victory to the world. So, rather than disperse and come to nothing, the Church *grew*. Christians came together, devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (Acts 2:42).

Fast forward some two-thousand years, and here *we* are, Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, one of *many* congregations of the baptized gathered around the same Word and Sacraments. And although we *were* dead in our trespasses and sins, doomed to perish for eternity (Eph. 2:1, 3), that is no longer the case: "For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:21-22). Our preaching and faith are *not* in vain. For Christ has been raised. His victory is *real*. The cross was *not* a defeat, but as we sang on Good Friday (*LSB* 454:4),

Faithful cross, true sign of triumph,  
 Be for all the noblest tree;  
 None in foliage, none in blossom,  
 None in fruit thine equal be;  
 Symbol of the world's redemption,  
 For the weight that hung on thee.

The empty grave is the proof. It means that the Father has *accepted* His Son's offering on our behalf. And so, we know that Jesus was telling the truth! He really *does* have authority on earth to forgive sins! He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, paying their deadly price with His blood.

And because He lives, though we die, yet shall *we* live. "For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised *imperishable*" (1 Cor. 15:51). On the Last Day, God will raise us and all the dead, and give eternal life to all believers in Christ. That gives us, and especially the bereaved, courage and faith within the Church, giving us strength in the assurance of a holy and certain hope and in the joyful expectation of eternal life with those we love who have departed in the faith. We will see them again, and we will be glad.

So, imagine a world in which Christ was not raised. And then, rejoice that you live in *this* one, where Christ *has* been raised from the dead. "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied" (1 Cor. 12:19). But we do *not* have

hope in this life only: we have hope in the life of the world to come. We live by faith in the Son of God, who both died and was raised for our justification (Rom. 4:25). *This* is the world in which we live. And this is most certainly true.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! (He is risen indeed! Alleluia!)

*In † Jesus' name. Amen.*

*Soli Deo gloria*