

Hope Resurrected

Text: Mark 16:1-8

Hymn: "Jesus Christ Is Ris'n Today" (*LSB* 457)

I recently listened to an interview with the author of a new book on the fall of the Soviet Union and the roles played by President Reagan, Prime Minister Thatcher, and Secretary Gorbachev. Something struck me especially about what the expert had to say about Margaret Thatcher, whom I'm sure many of you remember. She was a very tenacious, strong-willed leader, so much so she was known as the Iron Lady. The author said that, yes, she was a tough lady, but she also had a softer side and told the story of how in 1984, she was staying at the Grand Hotel in Brighton, England. At about 2:00 in the morning, a terrorist bomb, intended for Thatcher, exploded. She was spared, as were most of her cabinet members, but a half dozen of her friends were all killed. That Sunday she went to church, as apparently was her custom (I did not know this about Margaret Thatcher), and as she sang the hymns, heard the sermon, and saw the sunlight flood through the stained glass window, this Iron Lady wept. She wept and wrote afterwards, "Suddenly everything around me had changed. Even the familiar had become unfamiliar."

I know that many of you have had the same experience in your lives. Many of us know from the death of a loved one the power that death has to make even the familiar suddenly seem unfamiliar. The power it has to make the same surroundings seem so different from what they were just a week or a month or a year ago. Death strips from our lives those who were always near to us, and how hard it is to imagine them now so far away! We all know this feeling. And if we don't, we will.

Undoubtedly, that's the sort of pain that must have gripped the women who went to the tomb, who suddenly had Jesus taken from them so quickly and nailed so quickly to a Roman cross on a hill just outside of Jerusalem. They were devastated by what they saw happen on that cross and their minds had to have been confused—their confidence crushed by the death of the one in whom they had placed their hopes. A victim obviously of the sins of other people, but not just the Romans and the Jews who cried out, "Crucify him!" They knew somehow their own sins were involved in the crucifixion of this one they loved so much.

Sin had done its worst. And it must have seemed to them that their and the world's sins were far bigger than the man about whom John the Baptist had said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." No, Jesus had not taken sin away but sin had taken Him away and death was now holding him down.

Sin does that, you know? Sin will take people away. Death will hold people down. Scriptures says, "Just as through one man sin entered the world and death through sin, death has spread to all men, because all have sinned." Sin puts us down. And death holds us down, even as the prophet Isaiah says. He calls death the shroud spread over all people. It's there for all. It's the common denominator. And for most it comes to us much sooner than we wish it would, not just in our 80s and 90s but all too often to youth and to children, as it has come to two of our congregation's own this year, as it came by violence to three nine-year-old children in Nashville just 2 weeks ago.

Any wonder that the disciples were afraid in the face of death? How many times in our text for today do we hear that the women were afraid? They were *alarmed*. They were *trembling*. They were *bewildered*. They fled from the tomb and said nothing to

anyone because they were *afraid*. Five times in a few sentences. A terrified bunch, these women, as well as the disciples who we know that same day were huddled in a locked room for fear of the Jews, frightened alike.

And who can blame them? Who can blame them for saying nothing to anyone? After all, hatred for a king is often transferred to the king's courtiers and this Jesus was their king. There was even a sign above the cross that said, "King of the Jews." Will the violence not be transferred from the King to his courtiers if they dare to bring the message elsewhere? They naturally assumed the same would happen to them.

At one point during the reign of King Henry VIII, the King ordered one of his courtiers to carry a message to the King of France. The message was very heated and threatening. Understandably, the courtier was nervous about being the bearer of all this bad and angry news. So he, quite bravely, approached King Henry and said, "Your Majesty, I beg your pardon, but if the king of France is angered by your message to him, he may well cut off my head." King Henry dismissed this and said, "Have no fear. If he does that to you, I'll respond by cutting off the heads of a hundred of his French subjects living here in England." To which the courtier replied, "That's all very well, Your Majesty, but I don't think any of those heads will fit my shoulders."

And he was right. The King saying, "Have no fear," means nothing at all if the king doesn't have the power to restore what the courtier loses, especially if what he loses is his own life. And that's why of all days this day, Easter, is so important to our faith and to our confession and that's why the words first spoken by the angel of God to the women who arrived at the vacated tomb is vital to each and every one of us: "Why seek you the living among the dead? He is not here. He is risen." Those are the words

that declare to all people of all time in all places that our King is different from every other king. Our King will restore whatever in life his faithful courtiers and confessors lose at the hands of the world. Those are words that resurrect hope within us when it seems in every other way that all hope has died. Words about a resurrected reality confirmed and then verified, not simply by a handful of frightened men or a handful of bewildered and confused women who saw him and spoke to him on that very path. The testimony of those men and women alone would be compelling enough and for any reasonable soul to say, "He is risen. He is risen indeed." But that's not all. To the eyewitness testimony of those many men and women, we must add the testimony that St. Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians: "I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins...that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day...and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive." Indisputable evidence in any court of law.

That's a fact upon which the church and your life is built. That's hope restored, summoning us to face our sins boldly: "Charge me with whatever you will. It has no place any more in my life." No more, because the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is my signed receipt, guarantees that my sins have been paid for in full, that God no longer holds anything against me. That's hope revived, summoning us to face the challenges and trials of life, saying with St. Paul, "I can do all things through Christ that strengthens me." That's hope renewed as we face sickness and loneliness and even death head-on, knowing as did Job, that our redeemer lives and at the last he will stand upon the earth...and we shall see him for ourselves. That's hope resurrected, laying

hold by God's grace of the words, "Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live" "Because I live, you shall live also."

And it all began on the day we celebrate today, Easter Sunday, when the dashed and battered hopes of the disciples were resurrected and renewed by their encounter with the risen Lord, the same risen Christ whom you encounter through the Word that you hear now and through the Sacrament that you will soon receive. The same Lord coming to you so that you do not lose hope. Even when it appears that all in the world that is wrong is in control, even when in your own life's experience it appears that death has won the day, don't lose hope. Death can't win the day. It hasn't won the day, not for you and not for any of God's people. And you know why. As G.K. Chesterton once wrote, "Christianity has seemed to die many times and rise again but it never loses hope because it has a God who knows his way out of the grave."

Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia! A blessed Easter to you all. Amen.

Pastor Brent McGuire
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church