

Easter Day  
Mark 16:1-8; 1 Corinthians 5:6-8

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

I pray that God bless you with true Easter joy this year. A joy that cannot be stolen from us because our Lord Jesus Christ lives!

What does Paul mean when he says, “Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?” (1 Cor 5:6)

He’s basically asking the same question as Mark, but we’ll get to that. First, we need to know why the Corinthians are boasting. Let’s face it, the church in Corinth was a mess! They were putting up with a young man sleeping with his mother in law. Members were taking each other to court. Civil court! There were open disagreements and factions in the church gathering! Their worship service was a free-form mess. Some members were denying the resurrection of the dead. They were abusing the Lord’s Supper so much that some members even died! Paul actually says “When you come together, it is not the Lord’s Supper that you eat!” (1 Cor 11:20) What did the Corinthians have to boast about?

Basically the church in Corinth was abusing the freedom of the Gospel and living in open rebellion to God. They were boasting in their sin! They were living as if Christ wasn’t raised from the dead! Any Christian does the same thing when they live as if their sin doesn’t matter. God loves to forgive sin and I love to sin, so what’s the problem? Jesus sets you free from your sin, yet so many continue to wallow in their sin. What pet sin do you have that you just cannot give up? What sin do you boast about? We’re not so different from our brothers and sisters in Corinth!

Sadly, we’re too familiar with sin in general and far too comfortable with our sin in particular. Naturally, we’re born in sin and into sin. We’re all born with the inheritance from our first parents Adam and Eve. We’re born in Adam’s image which is the image of sin and death. We’re born curved in on ourselves and enemies of God. We’re born into slavery to sin. All of us know this slavery.

And slavery is exactly what it is. And there's nothing you can do about it in your natural state. And the only thing that awaits slaves of sin is eternal death. Not just temporal death which we all face, but eternal death! The only hope we have in face of such condemnation is that someone comes and saves us from our sin.

That's what we especially celebrate today! Someone did come to save us. And not just anyone. The second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, came to save us from our sin. He became incarnate in human flesh. We celebrate that on the second highest feast day in the church, Christmas. Our God became Man. He was born in a manger in the image of God. He was not born into slavery but was the second man born completely in the image of God. The first man born completely in the image of God traded that in for the slavery of sin. And subjected all of us born since then into that same slavery. The second Man born completely in the image of God, because He was God, did not give into temptation. He was a truly free Man. And that free Man lived and died and rose again to set us free from our bondage to sin.

I cannot describe adequately how wicked our sin is before God. There's not enough adjectives to show just how wicked we truly are apart from Christ. And God does not turn a blind eye to our sin. He cannot. His perfect justice will not allow Him to turn a blind eye to sin. It must be atoned for. And it must be atoned for through blood. And not just any blood will do. Your blood and my blood doesn't even atone for our own sin, let alone the sin of anyone else. But the blood of God is powerful enough to atone for your sin. And not just your sin, but the sin of the entire world. Jesus' blood atones for the sins of everyone who has ever lived! The Bible says that Jesus is the propitiation for your sin. Propitiation means blood sacrifice. The resurrection of Jesus means that his blood atonement was accepted by God the Father. The blood of Jesus pays for your sin and sets you free!

One of my favorite verses in Scripture is Romans 3:26. The propitiation by Jesus' blood "was to show [God's] righteousness at the present time, so that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." God is just. I know that all of you have been sinned against. And that matters to God. Your pain and suffering matter to God. His justice demands payment for any sin committed against you! But we have a problem because we have sinned against others.

How can God mete out justice against those who have sinned against you at the same time He metes out justice for your sin against others? The only way He can do that is by becoming your justifier. He takes your place on the cross and pays the penalty for your sin. At the same time He is taking the punishment for those who have sinned against you! He justifies you with His blood and not only you, but He justifies all sinners. If you're hurt by sin, look to the cross. There is proof that God doesn't turn a blind eye to your suffering. If you're guilty of sinning against others, which I know you are, look to the cross of Jesus. That's where Jesus paid the price for your sin to justify you. But look beyond the cross. Look to His resurrection. That's where you see freedom from sin. And that gift of freedom is yours through faith!

You cannot earn God's forgiveness. You cannot pay enough penance for your own sin. Forgiveness must be given to you as a gift. And it is! It is delivered to you through faith. "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (Heb 11:1) When you look in the mirror, you don't see salvation. You see the ravages of sin on your body. You see death working its way in you especially if you have really good light. And if you look into the mirror of God's Law, you see the ugliness of your sin. Then you look to the cross and the resurrection where you see Jesus paying for your sin and freeing you from bondage to it. We don't see it with our eyes. That's why it must be proclaimed. That's why the blood of the cross must be delivered to you in water, bread, and wine. Baptism applies the blood of Jesus to you so that you're cleaned from all your sin. The bread and wine deliver to you the very same body that hung on the cross and was resurrected from the grave for the forgiveness of your sin. Faith is nothing other than believing that the blood of Jesus is for the forgiveness of *your* sin.

When Paul convicts the Corinthians for their boasting, he follows it up by saying, "Christ our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, [that is the Divine Service,] not with the old leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." (1 Cor 5:7-8) The New Testament festival is the Divine Service. It's celebrated every Sunday. It's where God distributes His grace to sinners who so desperately need it. And Christians are at the same time saint and sinner. We still so desperately need the blood of Jesus.

God will kill off that old evil man in us with our physical death, but until then we are stuck with him. But we aren't stuck without help. God gives us His Holy Spirit who works living faith in us through the Word and Sacraments. God provides these wonderful gifts of grace so we can live a life of freedom in Christ.

To live in this freedom is to live in the sincerity and truth Paul is talking about. We don't shy away from the truth even though it's painful at times. St. John says, "If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." (1 Jn 1:8) But he doesn't leave us in our sin. He immediately follows it up with, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (v. 9) Then we live in sincerity. We strive to keep God's Law. We know that we are tainted by original sin, but we also know we have God's Holy Spirit who works in us a living faith that wants to live righteously. We also know that any work done in faith is pleasing to our Father in heaven. So we live sincerely.

Paul is basically saying, "You guys are living like Christ isn't raised from the dead by boasting in your sin. But Christ is raised from the dead. How are you going to live in light of the resurrection?" He's basically asking the same question as St. Mark. You'll see in your Bible that Mark's original ending is what we read today.

"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 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." (Mk 16:5-8)

Everything that Jesus said was true! He is risen from the dead! The tomb is empty. We know in our flesh that all men die. This is how Paul puts it: I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the imperishable inherit the imperishable." (1 Cor 15:50)

But what if flesh and blood rose from the dead? That is the question Mark is asking with his clever ending. What are you going to do about the empty tomb? How are you going to live in the light of the resurrection?

Paul tells us what it means that Christ is raised from the dead: “When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Cor 15:54-57)

You have that victory over sin and death in Christ. So let me leave you with the question of Mark and Paul:

How are you going to live with an empty tomb in the light of your risen Lord Jesus Christ?

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