

Easter Sunrise  
John 20:1-18

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

“God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.” (1 Cor 1:27)

Jesus appears first to Mary Magdalene. We learn from Mark’s account that this is the Mary that Jesus had cast out seven demons from. There’s speculation that Mary was a prostitute because of this demon possession she suffered. That may or may not be the case. Regardless, I think it’s easy to see that her reputation had been tarnished. When you put someone down as a character reference for a job or a volunteer position, who do you put down? It’s someone who’s got a good reputation, right? Not Jesus. He appears first to Mary. Not only was her reputation as a witness questionable, she was a woman. In the time of Jesus, women were not allowed to be official witnesses. Yet, Jesus chose Mary Magdalene. She is Jesus’ chosen apostle to His apostles. “God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.”

Yet the testimony of Mary is the testimony that changes the world. The world thinks that it is wise and strong. It is so blinded by original sin that it doesn’t see its own foolishness or weakness. And obviously, I’m talking about people in the world and not the earth. The earth actually knows better. As Paul says, it is groaning to be set free from the futility of sin. (Rom 8:20-23) But people are blinded by original sin. Oh, we can tell something’s not quite right. We may even sense that there’s something more than what our senses tell us. But that is all obscured by original sin. In our natural state, we’re born curved in upon ourselves and seek after things that seem right and pleasing to us. It takes a pronouncement to shake us up from the lethargy of sin. It takes a pronouncement to wake us up to the fact that we are truly evil in our natural state and we need a savior.

Today, we celebrate the resurrection of that Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ! Jesus is the second person of the Trinity who assumed man into Himself so that He is fully God and fully Man.

He created and sustains the universe by the power of His might as God. He ate, slept, grew tired, and cried like any other man in the face of a sin stained world. Yet He is a Man without sin. He lived perfectly righteous. He did what the first Adam chose not to do and what the descendants of Adam cannot do: Jesus lived a perfectly righteous life. And He submitted His perfectly righteous life as the spotless Lamb of God to the cruelty of death on the cross to pay for our sin! God died on the cross and shed His blood for you. His blood covers all your sin. The resurrection proves that His perfect sacrifice for sin, what the Bible calls propitiation, was fully acceptable to God His Father.

“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.” (John 3:17)

One of my favorite images of Jesus is the lamb with a banner. This is a *Christus Victor* image. This depicts the reality that Jesus has won the victory over sin, death, and the devil by His precious blood. He delivers that victory to you by sprinkling you clean with His blood and by continuing to feed you His body and blood. Holy Baptism is a “washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.” (Titus 3:5) You are washed clean of all your sin and given the gift of the Holy Spirit. But even more, you receive Jesus’ righteousness as a gift so that you stand righteous before your Father in heaven. Then Jesus feeds you the very same body and blood that hung on the cross and rose from the tomb. This also forgives all your sin as well and it strengthens your faith by bringing you into the full life of Christ. The *Christus Victor* image of Christ becomes your image and you are made a victor in Christ as well.

This victory comes to you through the organ of faith, your ears! As Paul says, “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ.” (Rom 10:17) “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1) Before Paul says that God uses the foolish and weak, he says, “Consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.” (1 Cor 1:26) When you look at your life, victory is probably not the first thing that comes to mind. How many of us seem to struggle with the same sin over and over again without much relief.

How many of us actually affect things outside of our tiny little sphere. And it even seems like we cannot even affect things in our own families. How many of us have lost people in our family from the faith? Yet we do not lose hope. We have a living hope in Christ. No matter how bad things are here in time or how bleak they look, we have the victory over sin, death, and the devil that is ours through faith in Christ. We are convicted of this because Jesus is risen 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)

Because Jesus is risen, we are victorious. No matter what the wise and powerful of the world say. We look weak and foolish in their eyes for such a hope in Christ, but in the eyes of our Lord and savior, we look like His little lambs. Lambs that He bled and died for. But since we live in a world full of the clamor of the so-called wise and powerful, we need to keep hearing the voice of our Shepherd. We need the voice of our Shepherd to drown out the ceaseless babble of a dying world. Where Jesus’ voice continues to go out clearly is where you have the voice of victory. True victory. Eternal victory.

Jesus doesn’t rule from a temple in Jerusalem. He rules with His voice proclaimed in all corners of the world. And that is where we find Him. Mary wanted to cling to Jesus as He was in His earthly ministry. But we cannot have Jesus on our terms. We must come to Him as foolish and weak beggars who have nothing to offer but everything to gain. God established His church so that His Word would be proclaimed in all the world and so that His gifts of grace found in water, bread, and wine may be freely offered to the world. But, of course, we treat these precious gifts of Word and Sacrament with the highest reverence. As Jesus commands, “Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.” (Mt 7:6)

The message of the cross of Christ and empty tomb that we celebrate today “is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Cor 1:18) The word of the cross does seem foolish to the world. How can the world be saved by such a simple proclamation? How does God conquer by a simple message and not a vast army? How is the death of one man in a backwater country in a backwater time of history efficacious for anyone! But we who are being saved know better. That is no mere man hanging on the cross, there is our God! The same God that created the universe and who created you hangs on a cross in your place to pay the price for your sin. And not only your sin, but the sin of the entire world. In this way our God conquers our enemies of sin, death, and the devil. And He gives that victory to us in a very simple proclamation. When you believe that Jesus died on the cross not just for the world, but for you personally, then that victory is yours in faith.

Jesus cast out seven demons from Mary Magdalene, cleansed her of all her unrighteousness, and made her His beloved disciple. Simply because He loved her.

Jesus cleanses you from all your sin, cleanses you from all your unrighteousness, and makes you His beloved disciple. Simply because He loves you.

The resurrection is proof that God loves you and saves you. His victory is now your victory.

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