

Texts: Col. 3:1-4; Mark 16:1-8

Subject: The Resurrection of Jesus

Theme: Real Life

Resurrection Sunday; Apr. 12, 2020, Online Worship; Reformation Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV

Grace and peace to you from God our Father in heaven and the Lord Jesus,
Amen. *Alleluia! Christ is Risen!*

Is this Real Life? It feels like we have been waiting a year to proclaim that good news: Christ is Alive! This season of Lent, this time of reflection and preparation has felt like a marathon, an extended period of loss and grief, that is still ongoing for us, with illness and death for far too many in our country and around the globe. How appropriate then, that Mark's version of the resurrection ends with fear and amazement. We might feel the fear of the women, who had been the last ones at the cross, and would now be the first ones at the tomb. We wonder with them, "What will happen next in our world?" They walked in the morning, wondering how they would get in, how they would be able to access the body of Jesus, to do the normal work that would come after a death. Many of us are ready to get back to work. The women had a job to do. The body needed to be properly prepared. After all, he had died on the Sabbath - this was the first time they could get there, at first light on the third day. They were shocked to find the heavy stone - the door to the burial site had been moved, already. Who did that? They must have been all the more astonished to hear the report of the young man - dressed in white - telling them,

"He is not here."

"He has been raised."

"He has gone on to Galilee, just as he told you."

This is real. Jesus is alive.

It was just five weeks ago that many of us last gathered for worship here in this place, we were hearing reports of the virus on the other side of the world, and some were anxious, others thought it was just another flu. We didn't quite know what to expect. We only know what we hear on the news, after all. We try to make the best decisions we can with the information we have. Then the businesses shut down. The hospitals got crowded. The schools closed. Many of you are working from home, and no doubt asking the questions we all ask: "When will we go back to normal?" - whatever that means. I keep thinking about the things I want to do, like get a haircut, go to the movies, or watch a hockey game. I want to meet up with friends, see a band, go visit folks in the nursing home. I have to get some donations to Martin's Mart, make travel plans, go camping. There's so much I'd like to do, and yet, I'm not able.

There have been moments these last few weeks when I've wondered to myself, or out loud to my wife, "Is this really happening? Is this real life?" It can feel like a strange dream. For many of us, everything seems to be on hold. Called to stay home and stay safe, I sometimes have felt like those ones who deserted Jesus, who walked away when things got difficult, or were afraid and went to hide. I have to remind myself, and we ought to remind each other, that our staying in is not a fear response, but an act of loving service to the ones around us who might be at risk, who are vulnerable, or living with other pre-existing conditions. I'm mindful that staying home is a privilege, with so many required to work long hours in hospitals, grocery stores, and many without places to go at all. It's like we've given up physical gatherings for an extended Lent, but have taken up new projects like sewing masks, collecting and distributing food items, or creating cards for our family members and seniors.

But it's not Lent anymore - today we mark the resurrection of Jesus! This is Easter Sunday! But things are not as they should be. It's a little different. That's okay. What will we do? We do what we can. One of the things that I've noticed is that we continue to gather online. That's a privilege too, I know. To see musical superstars, teachers, speakers, and leaders opening up their homes, reading stories, teaching classes, sharing messages of hope and sharing their gifts in shaky videos from their phones. People have opened up their lives in intimate ways. It's been beautiful to get to see my friends doing their work, going online to tell stories, to share the Gospel, to share time, to play games, and be in relationship in a new way. We use the tools we have. We have WiFi. It would have been a different story if we all have those old cell phones that looked like a candy bar or a brick, and dial-up modems.

One of the things that you might have seen on the internet is people referring to their online persona, their social media, or their internet profiles as some kind of virtual existence. Then when they talk about doing things away from their screens, they use the abbreviation IRL - do you know that that means? Yes, "In Real Life." It's as if what we say or do online doesn't actually matter. If you've ever gotten into a political argument on facebook, you know that it matters. It's not fake. It's not 'virtual' life - this is real life.

We miss seeing each other face to face. I miss our church gathered in the same place at the same time. I miss hugging friends and shaking hands (Sorry, Doctor Fauci). We miss communion. We pray that this temporary period of social distancing will come to an end, and we will at last be able to be with the ones we love, to enjoy public spaces

and the places we love to be. But for now, we do what we can, we use what we have, and we live real life.

The women went to the tomb - they needed to give Jesus' body a proper burial. In their grief, they moved forward. They had seen where He was laid, and so Mary and the other Mary and Salome came to do the only thing they could do. But it turns out that there was *nothing for them to do* in that tomb. No anointing, no spices, no wrapping of linens. Everything that needed to be done, was done. God had done it! That must have been shocking for them - alarming, even. They didn't do the thing they thought they ought to be doing. We get that - when there's a job to do we think we need to do everything. Gotta start a Zoom meeting, gotta call everyone I've ever met, gotta stock up on supplies. Gotta give blood, gotta make a mask, gotta keep these kids occupied. There is much we *could do*. But, we don't have to do anything to obtain the real life Jesus brings us. This is God's freely given gift of grace for us. The Living Word is alive and in the world and in all the places and spaces we go and with us always.

This is Real Life.

Jesus didn't 'virtually' rise from the grave. He wasn't "kind of" alive. He is Risen! And we have been raised up with Him! Our lives are already in Christ Jesus - we are already living in the Kingdom of God, and we know there's more to come, but this is *real life!* We are in Christ Jesus, and His life, the Holy Spirit, the gifts of God are ours now and forever.

Jesus went ahead of the women. He promised His friends they would see him in Galilee - and everything He had promised them, He delivered. That means we get to receive the promise with him. We will see him. We will be with him. He will be with us,

even as we suffer, even if we get sick, even if we lose the ones we love, even when we are afraid, Jesus is going ahead of us and is with us.

We live this *real life* every day. The author of Colossians writes, "Set your minds on things that are above." Our minds are set on Christ and our hope is in the Living Word. God's love in Jesus has the power to move us through fear to faith. It's the reason that Jesus' followers for thousands of years are the ones who show up to help in times of crisis, famine, and disease. See us working now, the Red Cross, Lutheran Disaster Response, Lutheran Social Services right here in this community. See us giving, see us praying, see us serving in all the ways you do every day. Faith beats fear every time. Our lives are in Christ.

We believe in miracles - we believe that God can do the things we cannot do. God has given us the greatest gift of all in Jesus, who took the cross and died so that we would live Real Life here and now and live with Him forever! The Easter message is that death has been defeated. The tomb is empty - the grave could not hold Him. He was unjustly condemned, beaten, crucified, buried, and now He is alive! While Mark's story ends with fear, it doesn't stay there, Mary, and the other Mary, and Salome had to have told their findings to the disciples, who were no doubt also afraid, staying home out of their fear, but the story got out, the news was told throughout the world, and the doors to the kingdom of Heaven were flung wide open - the reality of Christ's victory over death was shared through the centuries. This good news is passed on to us, that we would not be afraid, that we would not live in fear, but in faith believe, and know that we belong to Him! Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed - Alleluia!