

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Are you familiar with the African American spiritual, “Were You There?” It’s in *Lutheran Service Book*. I’d forgotten that. It’s also in *One and All Rejoice*, the hymnal we use at Lutheran South. Pastor Mann from Peace chose it for chapel on Thursday before the school let out for Good Friday and spring break this week.

“Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” it asks, and then repeats the question. “Oh...Sometimes it causes me to tremble,” the stanza moans, and then the first stanza concludes, asking again, “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?”

“Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree?” the second stanza goes; and “Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb?” the third. Appropriately, last Thursday we didn’t sing, “Were you there when God raised Him from the tomb?” We’ll celebrate Easter at school when we get back, and we’ll talk resurrection, even as we do today.

“Were you there?” the spiritual asks. The obvious and simple answer is “no.” But that may just be too simple. Perhaps it’s not as obvious as all that, unless you want to say that you’re not a part of this world, that Christ was not given and lifted up on a cross for you (John 3:15-16), unless you want to say that your sins weren’t nailed to that tree and canceled there (Col. 2:14), unless you want to say you were not “buried ... with him by baptism into death” (Rom. 6:4), “united with [Jesus] in a death like his” (Rom. 6:5).

Surely, none of us here today are entertaining such thoughts! Truly, in a significant way, we were there! We didn’t witness it all with our eyes, to be sure, but we have in the last several days witnessed it with our ears, and we have believed. As we will hear Jesus say next week: “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29).

In the resurrection scene that Mark paints for us today, that we heard today, there are only two sets of actors: there’s the women and there’s the young man — an angel. Jesus does not make an appearance. The women do not see Him.

The women bought burial spices the evening before, when the Sabbath was past, and then they got up early to go to the tomb to anoint Jesus’ body. They had seen where Jesus had been buried (Mark 15:47). They had no difficulty finding it no more than 36 hours later. Their only worry was about the large stone that had been rolled over the entrance. But when they got there, the stone had already been rolled away. They could look inside the tomb.



Mark says. “[G]o,” the angel continued, “*tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you,*” and the women fled from the tomb, trembling with fright, scared speechless — at least, for a time.

Oh, sometimes, does this Christian story cause you to tremble? Does it frighten you? Does it challenge your faith and cow you into silence? That’s understandable ... something divine took place back then. We may sometimes think that it would be so much easier to believe if we had just been there to see it all ourselves. Well, we weren’t there, and we can’t go back in time; besides, it didn’t work out that way for the women.

No, what we have and what we must hold fast is what is sure: Jesus’ word to the women: “*you will see him, just as he told you.*” And they did see Him. So, “Stop your being worked up,” and believe ... like the women eventually did, too. Believe the eyewitness testimony as we’ll hear it in the weeks ahead; believe Peter who preached Jesus’ resurrection constantly. Believe the promises in “*the gospel ... preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved ... hold fast to the word*” — Jesus’ word. He told us that He would rise after three days (Mark 10:34), and He did! Believe the Scripture; “*Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ... he was buried, ... he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.*”

Fellow Christians, faith is not about seeing (Rom.8:24); “*faith comes by hearing*” (Rom. 10:17). So, listen and believe. Believe in Jesus the Nazarene. Believe in Jesus the Crucified. Believe in Jesus risen from the dead and living still. It was all for you, and yours is the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Cor. 15:57), for Christ is risen! Alleluia!

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.