

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

*One* verse (Mark 16:1)?? That's our whole Gospel lesson for the Easter Vigil?

Yes, and it alerts us to what we need to consider for the two things I would like to lay before you this evening.

The first is in the first half of this verse, Mark 16:1: "AFTER THE SABBATH HAD PASSED...." Why is this important? Because it tells us that the *Third Day is now upon us* in the story of Jesus' Death and Resurrection. This verse confronts us with Jewish Calendar reckoning.

For things that had to do with the Sabbath or with religious festivals, Jews in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century used an evening to evening calendar. Evening began a given day, and that day, then, ran from that evening until the next evening.

At the same time, the Jews reckoned multiple days inclusively. If a time frame began, say, at noon on one day and ran until noon the next day, that was reckoned as *two days*, not one day. Thus, considering these two factors: when a day begins, and how multiple days are reckoned in total, what we would call Saturday night, after sundown, would have been construed as the *third day* after Jesus's burial:

Day 1: Late afternoon Friday, after the crucifixion

Day 2: Friday evening, *after* sundown, through Saturday sundown

Day 3: *After* sundown on Saturday (and later that night)

*In other words, once night falls on what we call Saturday, Jesus can be said to have been in the grave for three days.*

This means that Jesus did not have to wait, so to speak, until sunrise or Sunday morning in order to rise on the third day, according to the Scriptures. He could have arisen anytime in the darkness of Saturday evening or night, or in the darkness of Sunday, after what we call Midnight. And I would like to suggest to you that that is precisely what did happen! **Jesus Christ, our Lord, arose from the death in the darkness of later Saturday or in the darkness of very early Sunday morning**, which is why we are here this evening, at the Easter Vigil on Saturday evening (which would be dark if it weren't for daylight savings time!), celebrating our Lord's resurrection from the dead.

And why is this an appropriate understanding? Because it is a *Biblical* understanding. **This is the pattern of our God.** *His saving work is done in the darkness, and when morning comes, proof of his salvation now comes to light.* A good example is in Isaiah 37. Hezekiah is rescued from the Assyrians, after the Angel of the Lord strikes down 185,000 men in their camp. The evidence for this—all the dead bodies—is noticed, Isaiah says, **WHEN THE PEOPLE OF GOD AROSE EARLY IN THE DAY/AT MORNING** (Is. 37:36). Perhaps a better

example is the Exodus and the crossing of the Red Sea, both of which occurred at night, while the *proof* of God's success was seen the next morning with the dead bodies of the pursuing Egyptian soldiers visible to all. (See also Daniel in the lion's den. God's saving of Daniel is seen by King Darius, after he arises early in the morning [Daniel 6].)

And so it is for us. *Tonight*, we proclaim our Lord's *victory*. *Tomorrow*, Easter morning, we will celebrate the *revelation* of that victory to the world. And our hymnody reflects this understanding. Tonight, we sing of victory—e.g., LSB 459: CHRIST IS ARISEN, FROM THE GRAVE'S DARK PRISON. Tomorrow, we celebrate the revelation of that victory—e.g., LSB 460, CHRISTIANS TO THE PASCHAL VICTIM, stanza 2: SPEAK MARY, DECLARING/WHAT YOU SAW WHEN WAYFARING...BRIGHT ANGELS ATTESTING/THE SHROUD AND NAPKIN RESTING. And both of them are important. Thanks be to God!

But what about the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of Mark 16:1? What does that tell us? Listen to it as it completes verse 1: (After the Sabbath had passed,) MARY MAGDALENE, MARY THE MOTHER OF JAMES, AND SALOME BOUGHT SPICES, IN ORDER THAT THEY MIGHT COME AND ANOINT HIM. What is this about? Simply this: In the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, the body of a criminal could not be anointed for burial immediately after that man's death. That action had to be done later—and in this verse, Mark tells us, the women were equipping themselves to do just that.

So-----what our text says is clear enough in its description, if you know the culture.

But what this verse says really points away from itself to another story in Mark's Gospel. Specifically, it points us back to chapter 14 (:3-9), to an incident that occurs on Tuesday of Holy Week. Let me read it from the ESV: AND WHILE HE WAS AT BETHANY IN THE HOUSE OF SIMON THE LEPER, AS HE WAS RECLINING AT TABLE, A WOMAN CAME WITH AN ALABASTER FLASK OF OINTMENT OF PURE NARD, VERY COSTLY, AND SHE BROKE THE FLASK AND Poured IT OVER HIS HEAD. THERE WERE SOME WHO SAID TO THEMSELVES INDIGNANTLY, "WHY WAS THE OINTMENT WASTED LIKE THAT? FOR THIS OINTMENT COULD HAVE BEEN SOLD FOR MORE THAN 300 DENARII AND GIVEN TO THE POOR." AND THEY SCOLDED HER. BUT JESUS SAID: "LEAVE HER ALONE. WHY DO YOU TROUBLE HER? SHE HAS DONE A BEAUTIFUL THING TO ME. FOR YOU ALWAYS HAVE THE POOR WITH YOU, AND WHENEVER YOU WANT, YOU CAN DO GOOD FOR THEM. BUT YOU WILL NOT ALWAYS HAVE ME. *SHE HAS DONE WHAT SHE COULD*; SHE HAS ANOINTED MY BODY BEFOREHAND FOR BURIAL. AND TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, WHEREVER THE GOSPEL IS PROCLAIMED IN THE WHOLE WORLD, WHAT SHE HAS DONE WILL BE TOLD IN MEMORY OF HER.

Notice that this story is about anointing for burial, but, in this case, it involves anointing Jesus *ahead of time* for that burial. The key in this passage is verse 8, in which the ESV reads Jesus as saying: SHE HAS DONE WHAT SHE COULD; SHE HAS ANOINTED MY BODY BEFOREHAND FOR BURIAL. In fact, the Greek is quite different, given the total context. Literally, it says: SHE DID WHAT SHE “GOT”/WHAT SHE GRASPED/WHAT SHE CAME TO UNDERSTAND. And *what is it that she “got”/grasped/came to understand?* Incredibly this: that our Lord would actually be handed over to the Jewish leadership, that he would suffer, and that he would be killed—just as he promised three in his 3 predictions of his Passion. So, she wanted to anoint him ahead of time, since she would not be able to do so before his burial.

But even more incredibly—which is why we are talking about this woman at our Vigil this Easter eve—this fantastic follower of our Lord believed the Lord’s *further* promise—also part of the 3 Passion Predictions—that he would rise again on the third day, after the Sabbath had passed, so that *he would not be there in the tomb* for her to anoint his body at a later time!! Yes, she grasped that he would no longer be there, **just as he had said!!** Which is why she is not to be found with Mary Magdalene, Mary the Mother of James, and Salome, who bought spices in order to come and anoint him after the Sabbath had passed, that is to say, *on the third day*. For this woman, to do so would have been the errand of a fool.

*This* is why Jesus commends her so profusely at the end of this scene in Mark, chapter 14. This is what he says, you may remember: WHEREVER THE GOSPEL IS PREACHED IN THE WHOLE WORLD, ALSO THAT WHICH SHE HAS DONE WILL BE SPOKEN OF OPENLY—*IN MEMORY OF HER*. There is *no great example of faith in the entire Gospel of Mark*. Indeed, there is *no greater testimony to the surety of Jesus's words—to the reliability of Jesus's promises*—than the actions of this unnamed woman, who relied totally upon them. For Jesus specifically commends this woman's understanding and her reliance upon his words of promise. In fact, he makes them a part of the Gospel that will be preached! And *this commendation is a guarantee that she was in every way correct*. Yes, **our Lord's Words are sure**—and—on this day after the Sabbath he is, indeed, risen from the dead!

Brothers and sisters in Christ, follow in the footsteps of this woman from Mark 14, who anointed him ahead of time for his burial. Trust in the promises of our Lord. For these promises are ever sure. And the most important promise concerns this very night.

Yes, our Lord was handed over on Holy Thursday—just as he said.

Yes, our Lord was beaten and killed on Good Friday—just as he said.

But now, on this night, Our Lord arose, no more to die—**just as he said!!** There is no need of burial anointing anymore!

Thanks be to God!!

Amen!

Easter Vigil, Saturday, March 30, 2024, Zion Lutheran Church, Fort Wayne, IN