

March 31, 2024 – Easter Sunday

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Introduction

Christ is risen! Jesus is alive, and God has swallowed up death forever. With Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, we may feel astonished and confused, unsure of what to make of the empty tomb. But this is why we gather: to proclaim, witness, praise, and affirm the liberating reality of Christ's death and resurrection. In word and feast, we celebrate God's unending love, and depart to share this good news with all the world. Alleluia!

Prayer of the Day

God of mercy, we no longer look for Jesus among the dead, for he is alive and has become the Lord of life. Increasingly in our minds and hearts the risen life we share with Christ, and help us to grow as your people toward the fullness of eternal life with you, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

First Reading: Isaiah 25:6-9

⁶On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines,
of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.

⁷And he will destroy on this mountain
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,
the sheet that is spread over all nations;

⁸he will swallow up death forever.

Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces,
and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth,
for the LORD has spoken.

⁹It will be said on that day,
Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us.
This is the LORD for whom we have waited;
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

¹Give thanks to the LORD, for the LORD is good;
God's mercy endures forever.

²**Let Israel now declare,
"God's mercy endures forever."**

¹⁴The LORD is my strength and my song,

- and has become my salvation.
- ¹⁵**Shouts of rejoicing and salvation echo in the tents of the righteous:
“The right hand of the LORD acts valiantly!**
- ¹⁶The right hand of the LORD is exalted!
The right hand of the LORD acts valiantly!”
- ¹⁷**I shall not die, but live,
and declare the works of the LORD.**
- ¹⁸The LORD indeed punished me sorely,
but did not hand me over to death.
- ¹⁹**Open for me the gates of righteousness;
I will enter them and give thanks to the LORD.**
- ²⁰“This is the gate of the LORD;
here the righteous may enter.”
- ²¹**I give thanks to you, for you have answered me
and you have become my salvation.**
- ²²The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.
- ²³**By the LORD has this been done;
it is marvelous in our eyes.**
- ²⁴This is the day that the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Second Reading: Acts 10:34-43

³⁴Peter began to speak to [the people]: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. ³⁷That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: ³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; ⁴⁰but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, ⁴¹not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴²He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

Gospel: Mark 16:1-8

¹When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint [Jesus' body]. ²And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" ⁴When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. ⁵As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. ⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." ⁸So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Prayers and introductions from
SundaysAndSeasons.com

Prayers of Intercession

Rejoicing that Jesus is risen and love has triumphed over fear, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need of good news.

A brief silence.

Holy God, we pray for the body of Christ, the church. Where the church is persecuted, protect it. Where the church is privileged, grant it humility. Where the church is fractured, heal it. Guide us all to embody Christ's love in the world. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Life-giving God, we pray for the earth, your good creation. Join our prayers with branches lifted in praise and roaring waters of new life, that together we may proclaim Easter hope. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Merciful God, we pray for all peoples and nations. Free oppressed communities from occupation, exploitation, and abuse. Teach leaders your way of justice. Empower peacemakers and all who work to end violence and strife. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Liberating God, we pray for people everywhere who long for good news. Roll away the stones that keep people from living with dignity and wholeness. Breathe new life and hope into people struggling to make it through each day. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Loving God, we pray for this community of faith and for your Spirit in our midst. Feed us at your Easter table and fill us with your wisdom, that we may serve and care for others. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Eternal God, we remember those who have gone before us in death. Renew our trust in your promises, that we live with joyful courage and compassion. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, most merciful God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your abiding love; through Jesus Christ, our resurrected and living Lord.

Amen.

A reflection for this Easter Sunday

Middle of the Story

Literarily and theologically, Mark's gospel ends awkwardly at 16:8. The women are astonished and afraid, and what most scholars consider the original ending of Mark seems more like the middle of the story than its end. What about appearances of the risen Christ? What about the joyful proclamation that death has not had the last word? Mark's gospel is problematic for those anticipating the more complete story of resurrection recounted by other gospels. For some circumstances, however, Mark's ending hits just the right note—especially for those who aren't sure about resurrection themselves, or whose own lives are in an awkward, unresolved limbo.

In Mark's version, all we have to depend on are Jesus' earlier words, the realization that the women must have shared their experience eventually, and the intriguing possibility of the empty tomb. Somehow the women's fear must have eventually become courage, but Mark leaves it up to his readers to wonder how. Still, Mark's "ending" contains hope: even in times of uncertainty and fear, we can *live* the story of resurrection, depending on Jesus' words, the church's testimony, and the intriguing possibility of new life in Christ.

As we too are still in the middle of our life stories, Mark's gospel is a good companion. Most of the time we live with an awkward, unresolved mix of fears and possibilities, in which resurrection is hinted at rather than completed. This is true for the church as well; this story may appear to be the end, but it's really just the middle. The story of the risen Jesus continues in the mission of the church, Christ's body. The possibility of resurrection draws us into a community that lives out the middle of its story in the hope and witness of Christ's new life.



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