

Sermon Easter 2021

April 4, 2021

John 20:1-18

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed! Alleluia!

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson previously read, especially these words: **“for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead.”**

As we look around, if you're like me, you have a sense as you look at the world where it feels like chaos. If you look at the goings on of things, they feel unstable. If you look around at our country, it's divided and tense. If you look at our culture, it feels ungrounded. I touched on this a couple of weeks ago when talking about lies around us and the truth. But what we see is that this is a byproduct of what we call Postmodernism.

To give an oversimplified explanation of this, what has happened in Postmodernism is that people have said that we can sort of understand the world like we do about reading a book. Think about how reading books goes. If you read a book with a group of people, you all sit down in that group, and everybody says, “I liked x,y, and z about this book, and it means a, b, and c to me.” And of course, what's the upshot of that? You can't tell a person that x, y, and z can't mean a, b, and c to them, right? If that's what that means to them, who are you to say? So, Postmodernism, in a way has said that this is not only true of books, but of the whole world itself.

As you look at the world, you see various things. As you see them, you see them only as you do and are able to. I can't see the world as you do. I don't know if you ever thought about that as a kid. My wife and I have both said that, that we remember being young and wondering if someone else saw colors the same way we did. You know, if my visualization of blue is the same as yours. The reality is that we could never know. Postmodernism, in a sense, says that we can't, and so this is true for every person individually. It says, to take the next step, that you can't, then, tell someone something that is true for them.

That's where we are having so much of the challenge with so many things. I as a white person can't understand exactly what life is like for a person of color. I as a man can't understand exactly what life is like for a woman. Right? There is some truth there—like I've said, every heresy is grounded in some aspect of truth. So, we have a mentality where you have your truth and I have mine. I can't tell you what's true for you. You can't tell me what's true for me. And so, think about the consequences in this. If

there is understood to be no over-arching truth, no—what Postmodernism calls— no one metanarrative, what happens? Everyone creates their own, and what happens then? Well, a lot of things, but one of those is that you get ideologies. Now, Merriam Webster defines an ideology as a *“a systematic body of concepts especially about human life or culture.”* Now, that’s a fairly neutral definition to the word, which is appropriate for a dictionary. But think about how that’s a problem when all those little ideologies are in conflict. Or think about the problem if that systematic body of concepts is not true.

I was listening to a speaker this week talking about how much of an issue this has created. He was saying that so much of the anxiety that we feel in the world right now actually comes down to this. In view of these conflicting ideologies, what is right, and what is wrong? How do we determine that? How do we deal with that? Things that we have known to be right have been “deconstructed.” Some things we have known to be right are being attacked—for example the centrality of the stable two parent, mother-father home, to a balanced society. This is being attacked and torn down. These are being attacked due to ideologies. And what the speaker said is that as you see these ideologies, when you poke them, there’s a harsh response. As he put it, “People don’t like it when you poke them in their axioms,” that is when you provoke them to think about the things they hold as assured truth. If you push on that, people wrestle with seeing that their understandings are on shaky foundations. People can’t handle that.

And of course, as I’m saying that, I completely understand that there are those who would accuse us in the Church of being provoked if our beliefs are challenged. But I think you see how this is happening when the Church pushes back against the ideologies of our time. There is a significant reaction.

As I say all of this, let’s shift this understanding to why we’re here this morning: the resurrection. As we talk about “poking people in their axioms,” I don’t think any event in history challenges ideologies in any way close to the way Jesus’ resurrection does. Look at how the disciples react when this starts to sink in. They go to the tomb, they look in and they’re in shock. Mary sees Jesus Himself, and doesn’t recognize Him—and of course, that could be due to some supernatural reason where she is prevented from seeing Him. But a part of the reality of what has happened hasn’t sunk in. Why would this man standing before her be Jesus? Look at what she keeps saying: **“I don’t know where they have laid Him!”** What does she mean? “I don’t know where they took His dead body! I don’t know where they moved it!” There is confusion there, isn’t there? And I’m referencing Mary in particular, but we don’t get the impression and Peter and

John are much more on top of it. In fact, John tells us they weren't. And why? **"For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead."**

They didn't understand what Scripture had told them. Their axiom was being poked. Their understanding of the truth didn't allow for people to rise from the dead. Which, I think, to be fair, we can all appreciate. I've said this before, but how many people have you witnessed that have risen from the dead. You've maybe seen people who were revived, who had some kind of death or near-death experience, that sort of thing. But how many people do you know that were in a grave dead from a Friday to a Sunday morning that were raised from the dead? None, right? So, this is a fair truth to hold to. Until it's not. And this was the point when it wasn't.

But they should have understood it. They should have understood what the Lord had revealed to them in His Word. They should have understood that the Scripture was telling them that **"He MUST rise from the dead."** And do you hear the necessity there? That word must means that. This had to happen. It was necessary that this happen. Jesus had to rise from the dead. He had to die for sins, and He had to rise again showing forth His victory over death. But as we experience a sin-fallen world, as we experience a world where people don't rise from the dead, that's something that pushes against us, isn't it?

But think of the implications. If this is true—which obviously we believe it is in a very real sense, we believe this body of this God-man Jesus literally and truly died and was literally and truly reanimate—and so think of the implications. Think about what that means for those Scriptures that speak about it. Think about how that informs us to take those Scriptures seriously. And I've explained before how we have good reason to trust those Scriptures from a historical perspective. I've explained how that gives us reasons to trust that this Jesus truly did rise. And so think about the implications.

Think about the what that means for your life. The reality is that we often don't treat this as true. We often don't respond as though we believe it. We doubt. We waiver. We sin. I think about the rite we have in the hymnal for Individual Confession and Absolution. In that rite, there is language about how we have not let God's love have its way with us and have not loved others as ourselves. If we really believed this, if we really understood the Scriptures telling us that Christ MUST rise from the dead, that wouldn't be true. Think today about what that means. Think about how this is earth shaking—and I don't just mean at the tomb, where the earth shook and the grave was open! Think about how this is a reality that resets all others. It's Copernican, like the shift that went with understanding the earth as revolving around the sun, right?

It means that my sin is so bad that the God who has created the world has had to enter into it, take it upon Himself, and die for it. It means that as He did that, He earned the way to heaven and eternal life for me. It means that no matter how hard I try, and how good I might try to be, I couldn't do it myself to get there. It means that as Jesus rose, that sin really is forgiven. It means that as He has risen, death really is overcome, and it's no longer something to fear, but, as I've said, a useful servant to God. And what a blessing to think about in the days of a pandemic, no? Yes, this resurrection really disrupts all the ways that we push against this God who has created us.

Sadly, this is why we see the reaction we see in the world. The world can't handle it. The idea that there would be a God who has created all things, but not evil, who takes our sin and rebellion so seriously that He demands the justice of death for it, but yet who loves us so much that He Himself suffered that justice and that death in our place, that idea is untenable in the world. Either that God must be like something else, or He mustn't take sin seriously, or He couldn't love us so much that He comes into this world and becomes man like us, no matter the case, the world can't handle it. It pokes their axioms too much. It pokes them like we see in the reactions now.

But Christians, this resurrection tells you that this Christ can handle the world. It tells you that He can handle even you in the care and love that motivated His resurrection. And so, this means you don't have to react like the world when the world tries to poke your axioms. Why? You have a certain, solid foundation for interpreting the world. You have the promise of the God who has defeated death. That brings certainty and security to your existence. It brings certainty and security to your future. And it brings certainty to your own resurrection. Even if this world would try to tell you that it's too chaotic. What you can tell them is that there was chaos in the world at the beginning – the world was formless and void. But you know that God who brought order to that chaos. And as the world fell into a different chaos with sin, this resurrection brings restoration to that. That as there is this chaos now, the chaos of the challenge of suffering, of pain, of death itself, the resurrection shows you the God that has overcome all of it by becoming man and taking it upon Himself. And that frees you to do so much more. It frees you to love, just as this Christ has loved you and been raised to prove that love to you. Amen.

Allelulia! Christ is Risen!