

Grace Lutheran Church

The Rev. P. Stevens Lynn – Sermon

Sunday, April 1, 2018

Resurrection of Our Lord/Easter Day – Mark 16:1-8

*Grace to you and Peace from God Our Father and
Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen*

I've decided that the best way for us to reflect on the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is to have ten minutes of silent meditation – so we can really think about what Jesus means to us. So let's sit quietly through the sermon time today and reflect.

April Fools! Did you really believe that on my last Easter as your Senior Pastor that I was going to give up the next twelve minutes – to give up proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus to you. I'd have to be unconscious!

As I reflected on this, the last Easter sermon of my calling with you, I thought of all the sermons I have given, all the ways I proclaimed Jesus to you – stories I have told you – one Easter story sticks out more than all the others. It was Easter 2012 – six years ago. Those of you who heard it have talked about that story to me more than any other. So, in my last Easter sermon with you, I'm going to share that story again in a little different way – but the same story. So if you

remember this story, don't tell your neighbor – because probably half of our congregation is different now than in 2012. Here we go!

It was a lousy day for a funeral – mid-April – rain for 2 days – cold – a little foggy. The funeral worship at Zion Lutheran Church in Williamsburg, my first call – first parish funeral at the church was over and the family and I were at the cemetery for the committal or graveside service. It was drizzling rain. The family was seated in those little wooden chairs, under a tent. I was standing beside the casket which was resting on a platform over the open grave. Before I started the graveside service, the funeral director – his name is John Bolger – retired but still around there; John whispered in my ear, “Steve, move back! You're too close to the casket. The rain has softened the earth and if you get too close to the edge of the grave, the side of the hole might give way.” WOW! I didn't want to even imagine that, so I moved back. But when it came time for me to say, “Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust” I always took some earth and placed it on top of the casket. Now for me, with my short arms, to do that – I had to get real close to the casket. So, as I crept a little closer to do that and as I....Oh, K can tell this is boring, too many of you know this – maybe I shouldn't tell it again. Do you want the rest of the story? What happened to me as I was standing there? OK, as I was standing there and...No, I'll tell you again sometime.

Cliff hangers! Mysteries, what happened? Who dunnit? Who shot JR?

Who's old enough to remember that one? Cliff Hangers.

This Easter story from the Gospel of Mark today is a cliff hanger. Mark said – The women were scared out of their skins. When they saw the angel, they ran from the tomb, they went home, and Mark said – they didn't tell anyone! They just heard that Jesus' grave was empty and they didn't tell anyone. What was going to happen with this great news? If all we had was this, we would have no idea what Jesus' resurrection meant to our lives. An exciting amazing event – then what? If that is all we got – we got a real cliff hanger. But today, we do know the rest of the story. We have the other Gospels and the book of Acts, and Paul's letters and Luther's works. We have Pentecost and the Holy Spirit. We do know how it all played out – but no thanks to Mark – all he gave us was a cliff hanger. Could it be that today, Easter Sunday God is inviting us into his story – to pick up where Mark's left off? Isn't that the ministry of the church – to be gathered in, to be fed and then to be sent – sent to tell the story and what Jesus "alive" means for our lives. Just because the women didn't tell what they saw that day, and the male disciples didn't even show up on the first Easter Sunday – because they were all silent doesn't mean we have to be. So, today I proclaim to you – Jesus is alive! He was dead, but now he's alive! Will you go home from here and will you be silent – will your life not reflect Jesus alive! Our lives are different today because

Jesus beat death. The resurrection of Jesus is real. It is no April Fools joke. You know, it's the biggest April Fools joke ever to those who killed him. It's an April Fools joke to sin, evil and death. Sin and death and all evil – all thought they got rid of him. But April Fools! Jesus is alive. Remember how scary Jack Nicholson was in “The Shining!” – He's back! Well Jesus was just as scary to sin, death and all evil forces out there when he said to them, “I'm back!”—“You can never contain me! – I'm alive!”

Let me share with you what the resurrection of Jesus – Jesus alive means to me. Jesus alive means many things – but I have time to tell you about two of them. Because Jesus beat death, that means he has power over it. Amazing! And more amazing is that he chooses to love us – and in that love, he wants to be in a close relationship with us – forever! So, he promises to raise us when we die so we can always be with him. Do you hear that? He promises to bring life back to our beings – to whom we are. And he can do that – Why? Because he's on the other side of death. I can promise you that I will be here next Sunday to see you, but I could die before then and not keep my promise. But Jesus is alive, he's on the other side of death, he mastered it, so that means nothing can prevent him from keeping his promises to you – not even death. So when Jesus promises you he will raise you from the dead when you die – he will! That's an unconditional promise – Not conditioned by death – like every promise we make. After we die, Jesus will

take all of us unto himself and we will be part of his story – forever. That’s the first thing Jesus alive means to me. Now the second thing – Because Jesus is alive – that means he is present to love me and help me now. Present to comfort me, strengthen me, challenge me and teach me. And the most important lesson Jesus has taught me in 64 years is about love. It’s love, my sisters and brothers. Jesus is alive. It’s really not about rules and laws – they are only needed here for order and safety – because we don’t love as well as we should. Love God – Love Neighbor – that’s it! Think in love. Act in love. When we do that, justice will happen and we can only have peace when we have justice – But it starts and ends in love. Jesus is alive – beside you – in you – helping you to know love – to feel love – to be love. When you feel secure in God’s love – selfishness and egoism and fear and insecurity will all diminish. Jesus alive – can do that for us. That’s the rest of the story for me. Even though the disciples were silent after the resurrection, Jesus wants you and me to fill that silence. How about it? How does your life feel that cliff hanging silence? Make the resurrection make a difference. There’s a slogan that’s been around for years and I heard it again last week. It said: “The Cadbury Bunny knows Easter.” The Cadbury Bunny knows Easter?? Are you kidding me? Who knows Easter? Jesus knows Easter! Jesus knows resurrection! And you know Jesus. Talk it, live it. Fill the story! No cliff hangers here! So, no cliff hangers?

Okay, I was standing way too close to the casket – placing dirt on it – the loose earth on the side of the grave where I was standing caved in. And I fell down, down, down past the casket until I landed on something hard. It was the bottom or the base of the vault. I was sitting on my haunches in the bottom of the grave – directly under the casket – mud covering my backside where I slid down. I sat there for a few seconds – not hurt at all – but in one of those moments where you think: “Oh, this really isn’t happening, is it?” Beam me up Scotty! But it was happening. I was so embarrassed and how would a family – already in grief – react? In the middle of thinking about all that – I heard above me OOO – Ah Ah – where is he? Is he okay? Then I saw this big hand and arm coming down – down toward me – this big hand grabbed my wrist and pulled – Up Up Up I went – out of the grave – almost as fast as I went down. And all of a sudden – there I was – standing on the surface again – now with mud from the side of the grave covering my front. And the family was still in those little wooden chairs – staring at me. The funeral director asked if I was hurt. I said, “No.” And then thank God, everyone broke out laughing. The deceased – his name was Walter Wilkinson – he really did have a great sense of humor – and his sister said she hoped God allowed him to see that whole thing. Well, we finished the service – mud and all – and as we were walking back to our cars, Walter’s wife asked me what it was like in the bottom of the grave. After feeling in credibly embarrassed, then what I

remembered most was that big hand coming down – down to me from above and then literally pulling me up – up – out of the grave – plucking me right out of the grave. I wondered and I still do. Is that how God will do it after I die? Will God reach down and pull my dust up out of the clutches of death and the grave? Well, Jesus does promise you – God will pull you out of the clutches of death – just as he pulled Jesus from death’s clutches on that first Easter. So, I proclaim to you now – Jesus is alive! It’s no April Fools joke. Jesus is alive. Jesus loves you. Mark said the disciples’ first reaction to that news was one of silence – a real cliff hanger. Fill their silence. Fill it with love. Complete the story by living your life loving, loving Jesus – loving your neighbor. That’s what Jesus alive can empower us to do. That’s my story – our story.

And thank you for all the wonderful Easters you have shared with me.

Amen.