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Easter Day – Mark 16:1-8 – Resurrection Reality

3/31/24 – Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Beaver Dam, WI

“You live in a deranged age – more deranged than usual, because despite great scientific and technological advances, man has not the faintest idea of who he is or what he is doing.” Walker Percy authored that quotation back at the turn of the century, and here almost 25 years later, I can’t help but feel like... true, but he hadn’t seen anything yet. Here in 2024, our world has never been less certain of what’s actually real. We have to deal with fake news, deepfake pictures and videos, fake and filtered personas on social media, internet phishing scams trying to steal our sensitive data, questions and answers and articles written by online chatbots... Is the earth flat or not, and finally, what *is* a woman?

In some ways, our scientific and technological advances have brought us so far. Travel and communication, scarcity of food and other basic human needs, medicine and quality of life issues – we have made a world of improvements in these areas, and yet after all this time that you’d think we should have come to a clearer, more unified vision of reality, we’ve never been more confused. Social anxiety, depression, and a whole host of other mental health issues have never been more prevalent the world around. For so many, reality is a nebulous concept.

And since that is true, there is one place to which more and more are fleeing to find peace and security: *virtual* reality. What started with internet chatrooms and messenger programs has turned into a full-blown metaverse full of people who construct an entire second, digital life for themselves. And actually, in some ways, as VR has become more and more popular in these last years, that has translated into some benefits in real life. For example, research has shown some health improvements associated with exploring nature in virtual reality, when someone’s health or life situation might keep them from actually doing that. Or it’s been found that virtual reality can help patients cope better with the anxiety and pain that come with physical illnesses like cancer. And virtual reality even shows some promise for easing the symptoms of otherwise-debilitating phobias, addictions, paranoia, and PTSD.

But now I hate to be the one to rain on the parade – can you read between the lines there? Virtual reality isn’t *improving* reality; it’s *distracting* from reality. Even as far as our scientific and technological advances have brought us, they still have no real, lasting answer to sin and its effects on us and this broken world – and even if they have lengthened our lifespans to an extent,

they still can’t stop the inevitability of death. For the people of this world, mortality is our reality – or at least it was, until that morning that Jesus came out of his grave. And for everyone who believes in him, that changes our reality now, and it gives us the answer to every question that virtual reality and artificial intelligence cannot: Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

And that’s exactly what those women who went to Jesus’ tomb that morning were going to find out. They had lost their dearest friend and they just wanted to show him their love one more time, so they bought enough spices to anoint Jesus’ body like a king, and they got up at the crack of dawn and led their funeral procession right up to his tomb to say goodbye.

But when they got there, they didn’t see Jesus. Instead they saw a young man, an angel, just sitting there where Jesus once lay – so strikingly calm and confident given the circumstances that you’d almost expect to see him legs crossed, whistling, and reading the newspaper. And in that moment, they got to be the first to experience resurrection reality: “*Don’t be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.*” That changed everything. Don’t be alarmed, he said – well, they thought they had good reason to be alarmed! See, because of our sins, our reality was that we were condemned to die and condemned to hell, separated from God’s grace and goodness forever and there was nothing *we* could do about it to fix it. These women were alarmed because they thought that when Jesus died, all their hope for forgiveness and eternal life and peace with God died with him.

But when that angel invited them to come and see, he revealed an empty tomb that couldn’t hold Jesus in. That means Christ is risen, death is fallen, and the grave is overcome! As fearsome as those enemies once were for us, on Easter morning when Jesus came out of his grave, all our fear and uncertainty gave way to the sweetest success, *certain* triumph, and a new reality that will never disappoint us or fail us. The war was over and victory is ours, because Christ is risen.

That angel promised those women: no longer did death have power over their Savior, and so no longer did death have power over them, either. When they finally saw their living Lord, all their uncertainty was driven away and replaced by resurrection reality that could never be taken from them. Jesus lives, now and forever, and that means the devil’s reign of terror in this world is over. It means the age of fear and death in our lives will soon be at its end. And if you’re struggling with sorrows over losing loved ones or even over the prospect of your own death someday, Jesus’ resurrection means that you

will live forever with him and with all of our brothers and sisters in faith, and you will never have to say goodbye to any of them ever again.

So when your life seems so uncertain about what's real online or in the news or in your health or in your finances or in your relationships or anything else – your God points you to the reality of Jesus' cross and the empty tomb. Look to the Son of God who willingly died for you and then triumphantly rose for you, because this is what he promises you: no matter what the talking heads say, no matter what the news reports, no matter what your own doubts and uncertainties may be, Jesus' resurrection means he can overcome them for you now and forever. He rose from the dead to put all your questions to rest and to give you the reality of forgiveness right now, his constant loving care going forward, and resurrection perfection one day to come.

People of God, you don't have to be alarmed, you don't have to be afraid or uncertain anymore, because on Good Friday Jesus said, "It is finished," and on Easter Sunday when he rose up out of his grave, God the Father said, "Amen to that!" Now no matter what doubts and fears the devil may still try to peddle in our lives, the ultimate answer to them all is found here at Jesus' empty tomb, because that angel's message still rings out even to you and to me, don't be alarmed; the reality is that your Savior is alive and your times are in his hands! See, the whole reason Jesus went to the cross in the first place was to take away those sinful doubts and fears and to make things right for us with God again. Jesus shed his blood to wash you clean of your sins and to guarantee that because he lives, you also will live under God's grace and blessing, under God's real care and comfort, here in this life and most especially in eternal life.

Yes, Jesus' resurrection gives us a new reality for now and forever because that's his undeniable proof that our sins are forgiven, that all his promises are true and he always follows through on them for us, and that God accepted Jesus' sacrifice for us on the cross. My brothers and sisters, Christ's victory on Easter morning is our victory, because by his real death and resurrection in real history our Savior crushed the devil's head; he silenced all our doubts and fears forever; and he took away the terror of death by making it for us simply now the gate to eternal life that we will really get to walk through one day into our heavenly home.

And even as that angel invited those women to come and see Jesus' empty tomb, at the same time he also told them to go and share this resurrection

reality. The angel said, "*Go, tell [Jesus'] disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'*"

*"Tell his disciples and Peter..."* Don't miss that, because those were simple words that meant the world: *Jesus still wants us, even after everything we've done. Jesus still loves us. He still welcomes us. We're still his people, still his followers, still heirs of his kingdom forever.* That was a message of real hope and joy and forgiveness and peace that Peter may never have expected to hear after he denied Jesus those three times – but Jesus' resurrection changes everything. And my brothers and sisters, this Easter, Jesus calls your name, too, just like he did for Peter. No matter what you've done in your life, there is nothing his blood cannot cover and nothing his love cannot forgive. So leave your guilt and shame and sin there in the tomb, because Jesus' resurrection gives you a new reality full of forgiveness and faithfulness forevermore. That means all your sins are gone forever, you can depend on every word and promise Jesus has ever given you, and through faith in your risen Lord, you have the resurrection reality of salvation and eternal life in heaven one day. And so now when our lives and our world may have so many questions, we find our answers in Jesus, because by his death and resurrection for us he overcame this sinful world and now he calls us out of it as well – not just to Galilee like he told the disciples, but to the heavenly home he's preparing for us where we really will see him face-to-face forever, just as he told us.

Those women who went to Jesus tomb that morning had some real fears – and so do we. Those disciples who abandoned Jesus had some real regrets – and so do we. We struggle with the same questions and burdens and realities as everyone else – just because we're Christians living 2,000 years later doesn't mean we don't know how hard and confusing life can be in the real world. So how can we escape the reality of sin and its consequences in our lives and eternities? Not with *virtual* reality. Not with *artificial* intelligence. Not with the latest scientific or technological advances, as amazing as they might be. No, the only escape for sin, death, and the grave is resurrection reality. Because Jesus lives, our fears are put to rest, our regrets are made right, and our questions have been given the perfect, final answer. Yes, on Easter morning, that angel sat next to Jesus' empty tomb and proclaimed for all the world to hear: sin, death, and the devil have fallen and heaven for you now stands open, because – let's say it together – Christ is Risen! He is Risen! Indeed! Alleluia! Amen.