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St. John's Lutheran Church of Burlington  
31 March 2024

Sermon on John 20:1-18

Worship Theme:

## **RESURRECTION REALITY**

“Christ has indeed been raised from the dead.” (1 Cor 15:20) We must not think of Jesus’ resurrection like a happy ending to another epic fable. The resurrection is not legend. It really happened. Easter is not just a holiday. Easter is history. Jesus’ resurrection defines reality for us all. If Christ remained dead, then he is a fraud and failure, and the grave is the final, ugly, rotten end of us all. But Christ has indeed been raised! And the reality of Jesus’ resurrection proves that Jesus is exactly what he claimed to be – the Son of God, our Lord and Savior – and that someday “all will be made alive!” (1 Cor. 15:22)

Sermon Theme: “**Awake! It’s Gone!**”

Grace, and mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our living Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. AMEN!

“WAKE UP!” Terrifying, isn’t it? Whether it’s the middle of the night and something is going terribly wrong, or your alarm was supposed to go off at 6am and now it’s 8:30am, or it’s a special day we’ve been waiting months for and now it has finally arrived and our excitement can’t be contained, someone yelling “WAKE UP!” at us is a terrifying experience. We jolt awake, adrenaline rushing like lightning through our bodies, hearts pounding right out of our chests, panic in our eyes and on our faces...

...And that was the first Easter morning for Jesus’ disciples. It had been an exhausting week. Sunday had been one of the greatest days, people surrounding them on their way into Jerusalem, shouting praises to Jesus – what a day! Then a few eventful days early in the week, including a crazy day when Jesus cleared the temple of people who were doing business things in it instead of worshiping. Then it all went downhill in a hurry on Thursday evening. Jesus washed their feet, which was really strange since that was normally a servant’s job. And while they were celebrating the Passover, he gave them a new meal to celebrate, a meal which he said was his body and blood. Then Judas betrayed them all, and Jesus was arrested and beaten and mocked and questioned and insulted and eventually crucified to death in a whirlwind of events that they still couldn’t wrap their minds around.

One week. That’s all it had been. Life had been so good. Jesus was growing in popularity and the disciples were loving it – it seemed like nothing could stop what Jesus was doing! But in the most insane 24 hours they had ever experienced, they went from celebrating with Jesus to watching his beaten bloody body being taken down from the cross, completely dead. It was wrapped up in a hurry and buried, because the Sabbath was only hours away.

And now it’s Sunday again. Perhaps they finally manage to get some restless

sleep, even though they're all on high alert. After all, look what happened to Jesus! What would happen to his followers?! John tells us about this Sunday morning: *Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved. In Luke 24* we're told that the women were going to Jesus' tomb with a mixture of burial spices to finish properly honoring and burying their Lord and friend. Suddenly Mary came running back and burst in on the disciples: "**Awake! It's Gone!** The stone is rolled away and we don't know why. Worse yet, Jesus' body is gone too! We looked, but it wasn't there – we have no idea what happened to it."

As if things couldn't get any worse, now they had. Jesus was dead. The disciples were without their leader for the first time in three years. By now they were so used to having him around that they didn't know what to do without him. When the stone was rolled in front of the tomb, sealed by the governor's order and guarded by soldiers, the disciples knew it was over. The unstoppable Jesus had been stopped. He was dead. Now to rub extra salt in the wound, somehow his body was missing too. It seemed that Jesus' opponents had won again.

In many ways, our Easter doesn't look too different, does it. We walk up and down the aisles of Walgreens, Walmart, Target, and anywhere else and it's all the same thing: bunnies, eggs, chocolate, peeps, and colored plastic grass in baskets. By all accounts, we see the same thing Mary, Peter, and John saw: Jesus is gone. And not just at major holidays like Easter or Christmas either. We look at the world around us and conclude time and time again that Jesus must be gone – just look at what's happening! We examine our own lives and we see suffering, pain, sadness, loss, struggles, and hardships, and we hopelessly conclude that Jesus must be gone because if he were here with us and taking care of us, surely our lives wouldn't look like this! **Wake up, Christians – he's gone!** It's over!

But things aren't always what they seem. Easter is perfect proof of that. Peter and John had rushed with Mary back to the tomb and found things just as she said: the stone rolled away, the body of Jesus gone. Peter and John went away, confused and perplexed, grieving that the tragedy kept getting worse. Mary was so distraught she continued weeping through a truly astonishing out-of-the-ordinary event! *Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him."*

Wake up, Mary!! Do you realize what just happened?! Holy messengers of God just spoke to you from the empty tomb of Jesus! And did you notice they didn't seem upset by anything? In fact, they asked why you are crying in a way that suggests there's no reason for crying here! And it was about to get even better.

*At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup> He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have*

*carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”<sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, “Mary.”*

All in a flash, tears of sadness turned to tears of joy and astonishment. Two thoughts rushing through Mary’s mind – this isn’t the gardener; AND JESUS ISN’T GONE! In a moment filled with so much compassion and love, Jesus opened Mary’s eyes with the gentle speaking of her name. As the sun rose and banished the darkness of early morning, so also the darkness of sadness and loss was banished when the voice of the risen Son of God rang out. Awake, My Heart, with Gladness – Jesus lives!!!

Mary, Peter, and John had looked into the empty tomb and reached the entirely wrong conclusion. Jesus’ body wasn’t gone because he lost; it was gone because he WON. His tomb was empty because tombs are where dead bodies go, and the body of the Son of God was alive and well. His tomb had served its purpose and was now no longer needed. Jesus was laid in his tomb because the punishment sin demanded was death. Jesus really died, which means Jesus really paid the full penalty and price to take away the sin of the world, including every one of your sins and every one of mine – he didn’t leave a single one out; they’re all forgiven! Which means we can cry out, “**Awake! It’s Gone!** Sin is gone forever!” Our sins cannot trouble us any longer because Jesus has taken them away. Sin is gone!

And Jesus’ tomb isn’t the only empty one. The tombs of God’s holy people will be filled for a time, and many already have been for centuries. If the world is around for centuries more, our tombs will all be filled too. But only for a little while! When our time in this world comes to an end, it’s not an end for everything – only the bad and evil! We breathe our last breath in this world, and our soul is taken immediately to Jesus in heaven. Our bodies are laid to rest in a grave, but not forever; only until Jesus comes again. The Living Lord and Savior will come again on the Last Day and he will empty the graves of all his people, reuniting body and soul and bringing our complete living beings to heaven where we will dwell in the presence of the victorious Son of God for eternity. On that day, the words will ring out: “**Awake! It’s Gone!** Death is defeated and gone forever – life wins!”

Dear friends, this is the greatest news the world has ever heard, and Jesus has a beautiful task for his people: *Jesus said [to Mary], “Go to my brothers and tell them.”* Mary had seen the Lord – the victorious living Jesus! – and others needed to know. Many others still need to know and hear this good news – it’s far too good to keep to ourselves. When we look at our lives and are tempted to fall into hopelessness and despair, our Living Jesus stands in front of us again, calls us by name, and reminds us of this beautiful truth: It’s Gone! Sin is gone, death is gone. We are forgiven and free, and eternal life with Jesus in heaven is ours. So let the good news ring out – Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! AMEN!

And the peace of God which goes beyond all understanding will guard and keep our hearts and our minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.