

“Your Grave Will Also Be Empty”

John 20:19-31

Christ is risen!! He is risen indeed!! Alleluia!!

Last week, as we celebrated Easter Sunday, we heard of how Mary Magdalene and the other women went to the empty tomb and they saw and believed after they “remembered the words of Jesus” – that He would be handed over to the authorities, crucified, and on the third day rise from the dead. Remembering His Word, they became witnesses, having seen with their own eyes, that His Word was true and the grave had no hold over Christ our Lord. They went and told the disciples of this most wonderful event. But, as we saw, among all the disciples, they heard the word of the women and it seemed an “idle tale.” There was a reluctance to believe by all of them. We tend to only focus in on Thomas, because his refusal to believe is the most memorable.

The disciples did not want to believe the eyewitness account of the empty grave. Our world today does not want to believe the eyewitness account of the empty grave. It is an event that has been told and retold throughout the ages. Since that first Easter Sunday, Christ’s followers continue to gather together. Every Sunday is a celebration of Easter. No

matter what day we choose to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord, our calling is to remember the words of Jesus, receive the grace of God through Word and Sacrament, believe without seeing, and tell the next generation there is an empty grave in Jerusalem. There will come a day when your grave will also be empty.

No matter what season it is; no matter what time of the church year; whether it is Saturday night, Sunday morning, or Tuesday afternoon, when the people of God gather together around the broken body and shed blood of Jesus, we do so for one reason: because Jesus Christ, the Son of God, rose from the dead.

Each time you enter through those doors, each time you offer a prayer to God, you do that only because the Son of the Living God has nail marks in His hands and His feet. There is no other reason to be here. That is why we come. There is no other reason to even acknowledge a world beyond what we can see or touch.

As St. Paul says, "If our hope is only for this life, we are to be pitied more than all men." We would have wasted our life in some vain hope. Unfortunately, since the days of the apostles, this most wonderful good news that Christ is risen has been met with skepticism by a great number of people who refuse to believe until they see.

In the evening of that first Easter Sunday, we are witnesses of poor old doubting Thomas. Unfortunately for Thomas, his skepticism concerning Christ's resurrection is about all that most people remember of him.

He did go on to be a great proclaimer of the Gospel. The early church historians record that he carried the Good News of Christ's death and resurrection to India – where he stood up as the lone voice preaching the truth to the Hindu worshipers. He established churches and was eventually killed by Hindu priests because he would not stop proclaiming the words of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

What we remember about him is his failure on Easter evening. What we should be shouting from the rooftops is that, after seeing Jesus, Thomas was so convinced that there is the resurrection of the body and life everlasting that he would rather die than stop sharing this news with others.

In reading the history of the church, some of the greatest champions of the faith began with epic struggles and failures. St. Paul was a persecutor of the church. St. Augustine was openly a heretic for about nine years. He was part of the Manichaeian cult which found salvation in “knowledge” therefore despising Christian teaching which requires faith – believing without seeing. Even Martin Luther, in his early years as a monk was angry with God and even went so far as to say that during that time he hated God (because young Martin Luther did not understand how good the news was that there is an empty grave in Jerusalem).

But then there are also those like the chief priests in Jerusalem who refused to believe Christ was risen even though the evidence was before them, and the Hindu priests in India who also refused to listen to the Word of God and killed Thomas for his preaching. We see this kind of hatred is still

in the world around us.

There are those who are openly critical of God's message of salvation, who will never heed God's Word or allow the Holy Spirit to penetrate the hardness of their hearts. But that is not the kind of doubting for which Thomas gets criticized each year as his story is retold. Thomas was a faithful child of God who suffered from the same failings as many of God's children.

There are very few in this world who are born into a faithful family, raised with the Word of God, and remain focused and devoted to their Lord during the entirety of their life. Those who have been blessed in that way should give thanks daily for the Lord preserving them and not allowing them to wander away from the Good Shepherd.

But for most of God's children, there are stumblings and struggles like Thomas or Augustine or Luther. It is only by the grace of God that our lives are not demanded of us during our time of doubt and failure. But instead of condemning all of us as we deserve, our Father in heaven remembers that the price for our sins has been paid in full.

This is no idle tale. There is an empty grave in Jerusalem. There will come a day when there are many more empty graves because the Son of God has nail marks in His hands and His feet.

"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." Amen.
Christ is risen!! He is risen indeed!! Alleluia!!