

✠ I preach in God's name for God's people. Let my words be from God and for God's people. **Amen**

Alleluia. Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

Good morning.

The resurrection of Jesus was inevitable; it is the logical consequence of the crucifixion of the perfect Son of God on the cross. It's what had to happen.

On Thursday, we heard that Jesus inverted what it means to be the Lord—to be Lord means to serve every single one of his people. On Friday, we saw what he was willing to do to serve his people.

There we heard that only the perfect combination of the perfect goodness of God and the evil of this world could bring about Christ's death. Death is inevitable for us; but death was nearly impossible for Jesus. Life is what is inevitable for Jesus.

Our Lord Jesus—the Light and Life of this world, the one through whom the whole world was made—of course *this* Jesus could not remain dead, of course he was going to rise from the dead. That is the inevitability of who Jesus is—Light and Life Himself.

It was Christ's death that was surprising. But once his death took place, the resurrection was a foregone conclusion.

Of course, it did not seem that way to anyone at the time—not his disciples (certainly not the Sadducees—whose central belief was to disbelieve in any resurrection)—and no one else.

To their credit, the priests, as we heard Palm Sunday, knew and remembered that Jesus had said he would rise from the dead on the third day. The priests didn't believe it, but they expected the disciples did.

The disciples should have, but didn't. They had seen Jesus—just as the crowd at Bethany did—raise Lazarus from the dead. They knew that he is the Son of God. They knew that he is the Christ. And, just to be clear, Jesus repeatedly told them both that he was going to die, and that he was going to rise from the dead on the third day. (That's why the priests knew!)

Surely—on the third day, the disciples ran to the tomb to see their risen Lord. Surely, the women who were also with Jesus, who had also heard him speak of his resurrection, ran to the tomb to see their risen Lord. Surely, they all expected the tomb to be empty, right? Wrong.

Do you know who were the first to see the empty tomb? Not the disciples and not even the women. Remember that the priests knew Jesus had talked about rising from the dead on the third day, and so they placed *guards* at the tomb, lest no one steal the body of Jesus away. In Matthew's Gospel, from the Vigil last night, we heard these same guards felt an earthquake, saw the angel descend from heaven, and roll away the stone that sealed the tomb.

The guards were the first to know that Jesus had been right all along, that the priests were liars, and that the tomb was empty. What do you think those guards did? Surely, they immediately became disciples, right? No—like Judas, they exchanged the truth for money:

[11] While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. [12] And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers [13] and said, "Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.' [14] And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." [15] So they took the money and did as they were directed. (Matthew 28:11–15a, ESV)

The guards knew first. But they squandered it. They shared the riches of the resurrection with the chief priests. The priests took that treasure—the treasure that death was defeated, that Jesus is the Christ, that the Son of God is risen—and buried it in their bosoms. They could have—they legitimately had the opportunity—to proclaim the death and resurrection as the priests.

In treachery, these priests had (unknowingly and unintentionally) offered Jesus as the perfect sacrifice. In repentance, these same priests could have been the first to receive his forgiveness and proclaim the resurrection.

Alas, it was not to be. At least not yet. For, as we see in Acts, some priests do come to faith after Pentecost through the apostles.

So the guards knew the resurrection, and that meant the priests knew. Now to the women at the tomb.

The women did not come to the tomb because they expected the resurrection. They came to the tomb, as Mark tells us, to finish the burial ritual. They didn't have enough time to finish the burial ritual of anointing and spices, because the Sabbath was just beginning as Jesus was laid in the Tomb. And we must give these women credit—they loved Jesus, and they rose at the break of day, to finish our Lord's burial.

And because of their dutiful love, these women were, along with the guards, the first to hear the good news that Jesus is risen. Yet—should these women have expected the resurrection? Listen to the angel's words:

But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you."

Just as he told you—they knew! Now the angel tells them to go tell the disciples. But they are too afraid to do so. Not to worry. They do not need to make it that far, for Jesus meets these women on the way—and they see him.

So the guards knew, the priests knew, and the women knew—and the women saw the risen Lord. Then, with the courage of seeing our risen Lord, the women *do* tell the disciples.

How do you think the disciples responded? The same as all the rest—in disbelief. They think that they are hearing a tall tale. *Should* the disciples have believed? Yes—our Lord Jesus repeatedly told them that he would rise from the dead on the third day. And yet, these disciples remain in disbelief; it's not until the risen Lord Jesus comes to the disciples again in that upper room that they believe. And even then—Thomas is not there. What happened to Thomas that evening?

When Thomas returns among them, the disciples tell him that the Lord is risen. How do you think that Thomas responded? He does not believe, and refuses to believe, until he sees the holes in our Lord's hand, and sees his hole in his side. And so, again and later in the upper room, Jesus appears to his disciples, speaks to Thomas, shows him the holes in his hands and his side.

To Thomas' credit, when he believes, he utters this marvelous confession:

"My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28, ESV)

Who knew about the resurrection? The guards knew; the priests knew; the women knew; the disciples—and now, Thomas, too. All of them knew that Jesus had risen from the dead; but not everyone believed. Not everyone responded *in faith*.

It seems awfully similar to our own time, doesn't it? It's the same for our time; it's the same in our families and in our churches; it's the same for those with whom we share the news of the resurrection. For all of us—at least now!—have heard that Jesus has risen from the dead; that he is alive.

Yet this resurrection is not a surprise; it is the most singularly inevitable thing to take place in all of human history—that the author of Life would be *alive*.

You see, we have got our logic all wrong. The resurrection was not a surprise, it was inevitable. What could Death possibly do with Life himself? Could death, that ancient foe, really keep *him* pinned down? No—the only

thing that the author of Life, the Light of the World, the one through whom the world was made could do is be *alive*. The resurrection is the most certain thing in all of human history.

What is the most surprising, what should have caused the most doubt, what should have been unbelievable, is that the Son of God died. And yet he did—the spear in his side—from which flowed water and blood, the very source of our Sacraments—proved it!

How could Life have undergone death?

There is, for me, only one answer—the only way Jesus could have died is if it were Good for him to do so, and if evil were what brought his death about. (For think how often in his earthly ministry he evades and escapes death; death cannot have him, until our Lord was ready, and our Lord was not ready until he fulfilled all his promises.)

The evil of this world which crucified our Lord, collapsed in on itself, brought about its own undoing. The most evil thing—killing the Son of God—is the very thing that begins the end of all evil, all demonic powers, all death. You see just how beautiful the death of Jesus is.

His death gave Jesus an entrance to the place of the dead, to that ancient Grave, and on Holy Saturday, while his body rested in the Tomb—while the world rested—he began his work below. From the Vigil's homily:

If our Lord Jesus descended from heaven to give rest to those who were alive, what would he for the dead, now that he has descended even there?

All those ministers of death, hiding in the creeping places of the world, inflicting their last bit of evil power, were made to face the fact that this was no longer their realm, no longer their jurisdiction, no longer theirs. Satan and his evil host were revealed powerless. The captives of Satan and his ministers of death were freed.

There is no place outside the realm and reign of our Lord Jesus. His rightful jurisdiction is all places; all things are in his hands; all of time is his. You and me—and all others—are rightfully his.

The crucifixion was nearly impossible, and yet our Lord accomplished his death—the death which has brought life again into this world. The resurrection was inevitable. Once our Lord had died, there was no way he would not have been raised, could not have been raised, was not going to be *living*.

Sin has been atoned for. Our Lord's sacrifice is accepted. The resurrection is proof.

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

There is that one inevitability left. For he has told us that he will return. There is no escaping the inevitability of his return. It is certain, just as certain as the resurrection. All those who believe and are baptized will join our Lord on that Day—to enjoy his life with him forevermore.

The guards knew that Jesus was raised from the dead, and the chief priests, too. The women knew and the disciples, too. And we have heard, too.

What will you do—we do—with this treasure, the riches of this news? Shall you bury it in your bosom, like the guards, like the chief priests, like all those who heard the rumors but just wouldn't stomach the fact that it might be true, that it was true? Shall you be squeamish about it, like the women at first, like the disciples at first? Is there a Thomas among you—one who should have been here to hear this news—but alas, did not come this morning?

We have the riches of eternal life; let us not squander them. Hold fast to Christ, from now until your dying breath, for he is the Life and Light of the World.

Christ the Lord is worthy of all worship and praise and glory and honor and majesty, now and forever. **Amen and amen.**