

Sermon for April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2026  
EASTER SUNDAY

READINGS

Job 19:23-27

- 23 “Oh that my words were written!  
Oh that they were inscribed in a book!  
24 Oh that with an iron pen and lead  
they were engraved in the rock forever!  
25 For I know that my Redeemer lives,  
and at the last he will stand upon the earth.  
26 And after my skin has been thus destroyed,  
yet in my flesh I shall see God,  
27 whom I shall see for myself,  
and my eyes shall behold, and not another.  
My heart faints within me!

Psalm 118:19-29

- 19 Open to me the gates of righteousness,  
that I may enter through them  
and give thanks to the LORD.  
20 This is the gate of the LORD;  
the righteous shall enter through it.  
21 I thank you that you have answered me  
and have become my salvation.  
22 The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone.  
23 This is the LORD's doing;  
it is marvelous in our eyes.  
24 This is the day that the LORD has made;  
let us rejoice and be glad in it.  
25 Save us, we pray, O LORD!  
O LORD, we pray, give us success!  
26 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!  
We bless you from the house of the LORD.  
27 The LORD is God,  
and he has made his light to shine upon us.  
Bind the festal sacrifice with cords,  
up to the horns of the altar!  
28 **You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;  
you are my God; I will extol you.**  
29 **Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;  
for his steadfast love endures forever!**

### 1 Corinthians 5:6-8

**6** Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? **7** Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. **8** Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

### Mark 16:9-20

**9** Now when he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. **10** She went and told those who had been with him, as they mourned and wept. **11** But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.

**12** After these things he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country. **13** And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them.

**14** Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. **15** And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. **16** Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. **17** And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; **18** they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

**19** So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. **20** And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs.

Our text for meditation this Easter Sunday is on our Gospel reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Risen Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

[Note for Deacons and lay leaders: traditionally, the Very Lutheran Project has included very short sermons and encouraged our house churches to have very short services for Easter Sunday. The logic behind this is that Easter, like Christmas, is supposed to be a *celebration* – and Christians celebrate best when enjoying the day with their families and fellow believers. We encourage the same brevity today with a shorter homily. However, if your home congregation desires to have a *longer* service, we encourage the addition of an extra hymn after the homily, and chanting the Psalm instead of praying the collect.]

### **“Three Strikes and you're out”**

The expression goes, “three strikes and you're out.” Three chances. Typically this relates to the sport of baseball: the batter has three tries to hit the ball and run to one of the bases, and if he fails then he is out of the game for the time being. But “three strikes and you're out” applies to other things too, like criminal trials. A judge might give a ruffian a light sentence for the first two times he breaks the law, but if he commits a third crime then he will spend years behind bars. A woman might give her boyfriend three chances to stop disrespecting her before it is time to break up. Whatever its application,

“three strikes and you're out” always has the same idea to it: after three failures you lose, it's over, you're *done*.

The Apostles received three strikes on the third day when Christ rose from the grave. Three chances for them to believe that He had risen from the dead. The women came up to them, first with Mary Magdalene, but they did not believe her; strike one. The other Gospels tell us that St. Peter and St. John saw the empty tomb,<sup>1</sup> yet even seeing this... they did not believe, except St. John; for the other ten, strike two. Finally, two disciples saw the risen Jesus on the road to Emmaus,<sup>2</sup> ran to Jerusalem and reported the Resurrection to them all, and once more they did not believe (except St. John, as I am sure he would remind us); still, strike three.

So my friends, the Apostles had three chances to believe that Jesus rose from the dead based on the word of eyewitnesses. At this point, our worldly sense of justice and fairness would shout “three strikes and you're out! That's it, you're done!” We might expect Jesus to feel the same way, and go out looking for new Apostles to spread His message. But we would be wrong, because our Lord Jesus approached this by saying “*Three strikes and you're in.*”

### “Three strikes and you're in.”

Just as Jesus rose again from the dead at the end of three days and three nights,<sup>3</sup> the Apostles encountered the risen Jesus after their three chances to believe the reports of others. The darkness of the grave was overcome by the power of Christ rising for our sakes after those three dreadful nights. The darkness of the Apostles' despair, doubt and pain was overcome by the very same power as Jesus went to them personally. After spending three years with them and showing them all the ways that He is the Savior, Jesus would not ever permit these men to continue in their unbelief. He came to them and showed them that His Resurrection was absolutely real.

His arrival stunned them but also saved their very souls. Thanks to Christ saying “Three strikes and you're in,” they were overjoyed and positively *filled* with the faith that they needed. Shortly after this, with the coming of Pentecost, these very same Apostles fulfilled the prophecy Jesus gave: they spoke in tongues, cast out demons, healed people, picked up snakes and miraculously survived their venom,<sup>4</sup> and they preached the Gospel everywhere they went. Three strikes, and instead of being cast out they were brought into the Kingdom of God again with *power*.

And my friends, this is additional good news. Jesus did not die on a cross and rise again just to give up on the Apostles after three strikes; neither will He give up on you, no matter how many strikes you rack up! He says this, that “whoever believes and is Baptized will be saved,” meaning that no matter *how many times* we fail, He is faithful and just to bring us to being justified by faith in Him. My friends, this offer is always on the table for whosoever wishes to live eternally. Let us entrust ourselves to Him, listening to the words of the eyewitnesses to His Resurrection, for that very justification is the reason He rose from the grave in the first place.<sup>6</sup>

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Risen Lord. Amen.

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1 John 20:1-10

2 Luke 24:13-35

3 We confess that He rose on the Third Day *and* at the end of three days and three nights. For any who might be confused about this reckoning of time, the simple answer is found here:

<https://answersingenesis.org/jesus/resurrection/three-days-and-nights/>

4 Acts 28:1-5, St. Paul is bitten by a viper and suffers no harm.

5 Please do not handle snakes though. Once this prophecy was complete, Christians were once more vulnerable to snake venom.

6 Romans 4:25