The Resurrection of our Lord  1 Year Series

It is a good day to be a preacher, the best day, perhaps only rivaled by funeral for a fine old Christian. The days are really very similar in many respects for one proclaims the resurrection on both days.

Reading through the sermons of Luther in preparation for today is an interesting experience. Luther preaches the festival and his sermons are a testament to his mastery of the biblical text. His degree was technically called a Master of Sacred Scripture. What is odd is that his sermons today barely mention the Gospel text appointed. The women are briefly noted, but it simply launches him into an excursus on the meaning and significance of the Resurrection.

I have found this passage which I think was the best of them all in Luther’s House Postils, preached in the first part of the 1530’s. Luther was ill for much of this time and he alludes to this in the text below. For that reason he often was unable to get to church to preach. But in the evenings he felt better and he regularly held forth in his home for the many students and guests who lived in his spacious accommodations in the old Augustinian Abbey. These were somewhat informal, almost an expository sermon or a Bible study. Here are excerpts from Luther’s comments made on the night before Easter, 1532.

Luther

1. On Easter we celebrate the great, comforting article of our Christian faith: the descent into hell and the joyful resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. This festival was instituted in order that this article might be preached, inculcated, be truly comprehended, and retained by the people. For this reason we now want to devote our attention to this article and discuss it. We owe it to our God to praise and honor him, and to preach his Word as long as we live.

2. We confess it in the Creed, the holy Gospels teach and testify to it, and it is customary to preach about it during this season, that our Lord Jesus Christ died and was buried, descended into hell, and on the third day rose again from the dead. I would like now to speak on that theme. I have not been well and do not know how long I shall live; fanatical spirits are everywhere, and because that is so, I want to leave my teaching and confession behind for pious hearts that they might know my thoughts on this article.

5. It is true you may talk about the Lord’s descent into hell in two ways. First, plainly and simply, by means of childish words and pictures, which may also be the best and safest, as stated. Second, it may be discussed point for point, just as the account gives it, that Christ descended into hell, while his body lay there in the grave until the third day.

7. Now,...I cannot fathom or grasp how Christ descended into hell. Christian faith confesses that he descended into hell, and Holy Scripture established this article as true in very explicit words, “Thou will not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thin Holy One to see corruption” (Ps. 16:10). And Ephesians 4:9: “Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?” But how it all took place, that you will not fathom; and even though you were ten times wiser than Solomon, you still would not get it. Therefore, my
sincere advice is, stick to the simple words and childish pictures and do not let the astute
spirits, who want to cogitate deeply, without sketches and apprehend it with their keen
 intellects, trouble you.

19. That is the first part of this sermon, concerning the article that Christ descended into hell.
That is, that he has overcome the devil and smashed hell, so that no Christian need henceforth
fear and be terrified of the devil. This is he did with the banner, that is, with the heel whereby
he crushed the serpent’s head...

20. The world with all its powers was unable to deliver anyone from the devil’s bonds or take
way the agony and power of hell for a single sin, even though all the saints were to go to hell
for one man’s sins. Indeed all of them together, as many as have ever lived on earth, would
have to stay in hell eternally, if the Son of God had not gone there personally and overthrown it
and gained the victory by his divine power.

21. The second part of our sermon deals with the fact that our Lord Jesus Christ rose from the
dead on the third day. For this a strong, firm faith is required, making this article strong, firm
and salutary. The words, Christ is risen from the dead, we should blazon and inscribe with
letters so large that just one letter would be as large as a steeple, yes, as heaven and earth, so
that we would see and hear, know and think of, nothing but this article.¹

23. If now we believe this, we can live and die in peace, for Christ did not overcome death and
rise form the dead only for his own person; but we must perceive that it ties us mutually
together with Christ so that we also are included in the resurrection, and on account of and
through it we also must rise and live with him eternally; also that our resurrection and life in
Christ have already begun and are as sure as if they had already happened, save that they still
lie hidden and are not manifest. So intently should we look upon this article that by
comparison, all other considerations are as nothing, as if there was nothing else for us
anywhere, in heaven or earth. When you see a Christian dying and being buried, and nothing
but a dead corpse lying there, and nothing else to see and hear but grave, funeral chants, words
of death, yes, utter death itself, you should still put the picture of death out of sight and
beneath the surface, by faith, a grave and a dead corpse, but pure life and a beautiful, cheerful
garden and paradise, in which there are no dead people but now, living, happy human beings.

24. For because it is true that Christ rose from the dead, we already possess the best part of
the resurrection, so that the bodily resurrection of the flesh from the grave (which is still in the
future) is really secondary by comparison. For what are we and the whole world compared to
Christ, our Head? ... Therefore, because we already possess better than half of our resurrection,
since head and heart are already in heaven, only the least still needs to be done, that our body
be buried in the ground so that it also may be renewed. For where the head is, there also the
body must be presented, as we see in the case of all animals as they are born into this life.

¹ This is somewhat ironic considering he just preached 20 paragraphs on the article which deals with Christ’s
descent into hell. But he seems to see these as the same article.
25. Moreover, a second half has also occurred, yes, far more than half: namely, that already through baptism we have faith spiritually risen from the dead, that is, according to the best part in us; and so not only bodily has the best part of it occurred, that from the grave our Head ascended into heaven but also spiritually our soul possesses its portion and is with Christ in heaven, and only the husks and shells or fragments remain here below; but for the sake of the main part, they must also journey there. For the husk and shell must still rise, but the chief part and the kernel has already risen.

28. No one can deny that a dead human corpse is a miserable thing. But if it were a matter for human reason to adjudicate, then I could speak just as derisively as you do. People regard reason's judgment as very keen. But if I wished to judge according to what I see, I would be willing to bet that in any contest of intellects, I could make it much worse and more miserable than you could.

29. But I have a greater insight than what the eyes behold and senses feel, something which faith teaches me. For there stands the text, which reads: He is risen; he did not remain lying in the grave and in the ground but rose from the dead; and not for his own sake but for our sake, so that his resurrection is ours, and we also all rise in him and not remain in the grave and death, but in our body celebrate with him an eternal Easter.

30. Look what the farmer does when he sows seed in the field and tosses it into the ground so that it must decay and rot; it appears as if it is lost altogether. Yet he shows no concern, as if it had all been in vain. Yes, he forgets where the seed is. What is happening to it does not worry him in the least, whether the worms will devour it or otherwise destruct. (sic) He just leaves the scene with only thoughts like this, that around the time of Easter or Pentecost, beautiful stalks will come forth, bearing many more ears and kernels than the seeds he has sown. If a young farmer, who had never before observed seeds grow, were to see that, he would surely say, O father, what are doing? How did you hit upon the following seed into the ground? There it is lost, it will decay, there it can benefit no one. Let it remain on the floor, so that we can bake bread from it…But the father says, Dear boy, just shut your eyes and let me do the sowing; I'm not intending it to be lost. God speaks the same way: My dear fellow, let me deal with my Christians and don’t be bothered about whether they will be beheaded, burned to death, and killed; let me take care of this.

33. If you look at the body degenerating, decaying, and being devoured by snakes and worms, you are lost. But if you look to God’s Word and continue faith, you are buoyed up. For as God’s work year for year and experience also, attest, the seed which the farmer casts into the ground, letting it decay and in the summer come out of the ground, in another form and with much fruit, so our faith and Holy Scripture attest that our bodies, which God has buried during the winter and lets decay, at his time, on Judgment Day, will again rise much more beautifully than the sun.
35. Consider the story about St. Agatha: As she was led away to prison and to death, she said, I am going to dance; and when she was martyred, she said, Behold, how deep is my hurt; they are piping me music that I might dance...

36. Let us also learn to imbed this article into our hearts and take comfort in it; then we can ward off the devil when he sharpens his spear to use against us and threatens us with death and hell; we can respond to him and say, Devil, don’t you know any better than to threaten with death? Holy on, I am not afraid of your threats; you are singing me a beautiful little song and persuading me to dance; my grave is a pretty garden. For since Christ, my Head, on whom everything depends, has risen, lives, and is seated in heaven, and I am baptized in him, I thus am more than halfway there already, and but little remains for me to do but completely to remove the old skin, so that it too might again be renewed. For since the inheritance is already wholly mine, the husks and the shells must then surely follow as well.


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!

Of course, this is the root of the familiar Easter Hymn. If you are reading this, you almost have to sing it.

Job is a much neglected book which too often has been put to uses for which it is ill suited and problematic. It rarely shows up in the pericope system – only three times in the LSB three year cycle, and one of those on Easter.

The book is a strange beast. Of all the books in the OT, scholars think that the book of Job may include some of the oldest material. The story of Job in the prose sections in the first and last chapters seems to be ancient, likely older than the Torah. It was a moralizing tale of which we have a number of them in the ancient world. Its message was pretty familiar and straightforward. Job kept faith and even though he was tested, in the end things worked out for him. The moral is to keep faith with God. So far so good, but about 1000 years before Christ, roughly in the time of Solomon when the wisdom movement swept across the whole ancient Middle East, someone picked up this story and noticed something. God seemed to enter in a wager with the devil and poor Job paid the price.

This seemed unfair then and it continues to seem a little unfair now. It made God’s treatment of Job seem capricious and Job’s suffering seem meaningless. This observation then prompted the author, and
we have no idea who this is, to compose the middle chapters in which three friends come to comfort Job in his afflictions. But with friends like these one really doesn’t need an enemy. These three are convinced that Job’s suffering must have meaning and the meaning is pretty clear. Job is a sinner. They can only see a cause and effect process in which Job has sinned and this suffering is God’s punishment.

Job, on the other hand asserts his innocence. This wonderful statement we get from Job today with its assertion of a belief in a resurrection is part of Job’s response to his friends. But we need to be a little careful here. Job continues to assert that his suffering is not really because he has sinned. He insists that he has played by God’s rules. He does not say he is sinless, but that he has always sought God’s forgiveness. If God is punishing him, God must be unjust. That is a serious charge to level, and eventually God does show up to confront Job. The answer that God gives Job is not very satisfying. He says that God is God and if he looks capricious or unfair to us, we really cannot say much about that. We are just creatures.

What does one do with these words, part of Job’s answer to Bildad? Especially what does one do with them on Easter? The background I give above is hardly what we are going to preach. But the wise preacher will keep it in mind. Job is saying this in the face of strong assertions to the contrary. The fact that he is making a statement which will later be refuted in the book of Job needs to be kept in mind but it also can be considered somewhat irrelevant. Job does believe that even death will not be the end of his righteous cause. That is a story line we can get on board with here. Job’s friends are asserting what Satan would have us believe. Death is the final punishment for our sins, and it is an eternal sentence. Despair before it, you cannot flee, you cannot escape, you will die.

But Job sees that his righteousness is not touched by that claim and that makes death something else. It is powerless before that righteousness. It would say that Job must die because Job is a sinner. Job will die, even Job admits that, but because he dies a righteous man, his case, his claim, his righteousness, will not die. He has a redeemer, one who will take his case, and that means that Job in his own skin, with his own two eyes will see his vindication. We know that Job’s claim is somewhat off and later God will chastise him, but God also never unseats this claim to righteousness and indeed restores all of Job’s lost fortune and children.

Of course, you could just preach the hymn.

Psalm 118:15-29

15 Glad songs of salvation
   are in the tents of the righteous:
   “The right hand of the LORD does valiantly,
16     the right hand of the LORD exalts,
     the right hand of the LORD does valiantly!”

17 I shall not die, but I shall live,
   and recount the deeds of the LORD.
18 The LORD has disciplined me severely,
   but he has not given me over to death.
Open to me the gates of righteousness,
    that I may enter through them
    and give thanks to the LORD.
This is the gate of the LORD;
    the righteous shall enter through it.
I thank you that you have answered me
    and have become my salvation.
The stone that the builders rejected
    has become the cornerstone.
This is the LORD’s doing;
    it is marvelous in our eyes.
This is the day that the LORD has made;
    let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Save us, we pray, O LORD!
    O LORD, we pray, give us success!

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!
    We bless you from the house of the LORD.
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!

You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;
    you are my God; I will extol you.
Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
    for his steadfast love endures forever!

Verse 22 is supposed to be the most quoted verse of the OT in the NT.

I Corinthians 5:6-8

Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?
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. 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.

Luther

Now, how shall we explain the fact that he bids them purge out the old leaven that they may be a new lump, when at the same time he admits them to be unleavened and a new lump? How can these Corinthians be as true, unleavened wafers, or sweet dough, when they have yet to purge out the old leaven?
This is an instance of the Pauline and apostolic way of speaking concerning Christians and the kingdom of Christ: it shows us what the condition really is. It is a discipline wherein a new, Christian life is entered upon through faith in Christ the true Passover; hence, Easter is celebrated with sweet, unleavened bread. But at the same time something of the old life remains, which must be sept out, or purged away. However, this latter is not imputed, because faith and Christ are there, constantly toiling and striving to thoroughly purge out whatever uncleanness remains.

15. Through faith we have Christ and his purity perfectly conferred upon ourselves, and we are thus regarded pure; yet in our own personal nature we are not immediately made wholly pure, without sin or weakness. Much of the old leaven still remains, but it will be forgiven, not be imputed to us, if only we continue in faith and are occupied with purging out that remaining impurity.

This is Christ’s thought when says to his disciples (Jn. 15:3) “Already ye are clean because of the word which I have spoken unto you.” …These passages, as is also stated elsewhere, teach that a Christian by faith lays hold upon the purity of Christ, for which reason he is also regarded pure and begins to make progress in purity; for faith brings the Holy Spirit, who works in man, enabling him to withstand and subdue sin.

25. The second thought presented in this sermon mentioned is, the necessity of recognizing the inexpressible love and grace of God toward us. Only so can the terrified heart of man regain comfort. It must be made aware why God spared not his own Son but offered him a sacrifice upon the cross, delivered him to death; namely, that this wrath might be lifted from us once more. What greater love and blessing could be shown? The sacrifice of Chirst is presented to us to give us sure comfort against the terrors of sin. For we may perceive and be confident that we shall not lost because of our sins when God makes such a sacrifice the precious pledge to us of his favor and promised salvation.


I find this a strange text for Easter, and puzzling considering chapter fifteen which is used throughout the three year cycle and is an alternative reading (see below). It mentions the Passover and that seems to be the reason it is here, but it seems to be embedded in an argument which is hard to reconcile with celebrating Easter.

Luther points us in the final paragraph there to the real potential for it. Christ is our Passover Lamb. We will run with that as a sermon idea.

Sermon Idea: Christ, our Passover Lamb, has risen from the dead! (That the hearer would rejoice that Jesus who died for them on Good Friday has not only paid for their sins, but broken death’s doors.

This sermon would have the hearer rejoice, but embedded in that joy is a reason for Christian way of life. The preacher will want to juggle just how much he emphasizes the joy and how much he calls for the new life (the purging of the old leaven.)

Paul speaks of a Passover lamb that has been slain for us. The preacher will want to explore that metaphor a little. We are not used to it, but Paul and the people of the first century surely were. John had pointed out Jesus as the lamb who took away the sin of the world last December as we made ready for Christmas. Now we stand on the other side of that life and ministry and see Jesus’ tomb empty and
the Lord of Life sitting upon his throne. Along the way he has borne the sins of the world, carried them up a hill to a brutal death, and thereby slain our sins. Now God’s wrath passes over us.

But Good Friday would not be so good if it were not followed by Easter. Our sins paid for is great news, but Jesus’ resurrection makes it even better. For he erupts from the grave to announce to us that our sins are forgiven and we are right with God. I suppose Jesus could have died and that would have been enough, but would we have been sure? Was that death sufficient? Jesus wants no doubt and hence no question of our joy. Jesus has risen to empower our joy – the cross worked. Death is undone. Righteousness is ours. Christ has won the battle we were powerless to win and turned aside the righteous judgment of God by taking condemnation and death to himself. The Passover Lamb has been sacrificed. Now it is time to celebrate.

But the old Jewish tradition gives Paul another twist. The leaven – an image which Jesus used to describe the teaching of the Pharisees and others who opposed him. Leaven is tricky stuff. It is yeast, after all, and it can easily get into dough and soon it is doing its thing, even if you did not put it in there. Thus when Passover comes, Jewish people purged their houses of leaven. They were not to have any in the house. This has led to some rather interesting traditions. You can sell your leavened things to a gentile for a quarter, then buy them back after the Passover. You might even still store the leavened items in your house in a box in another room, but they are technically owned by the gentile and hence are not really there.

Paul speaks of no such games today. He realizes that the Christian life is one in which the old man clings tightly and sin continues to plague us. It would be easy for us to simply resign ourselves to sin and cope with it. But he will expunge the leaven. Jesus’ resurrection empowers that work. In him we see the end of the story, the glorious resurrection of the body from the grave. There is no coping with sin in heaven. There is only purity. So we battle away. We know that only he can win the final battle and we know that he has won it. But we will not lay down our arms in the face of this foe. For Jesus has risen from the dead and that means this enemy must be vanquished.

Or I Corinthians 15:51-57

51 Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. 53 For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. 54 When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”
55 “O death, where is your victory?
O death, where is your sting?”

56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.
Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

For this I simply commend you to the sermon of Chrysostom.

Mark 16:1-8

When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. And they were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. And he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. 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.” And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Luther

6. St. Paul writes in Romans 4:23 as follows: “Christ was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification.” Paul is indeed the man who extols Christ in a masterly manner, telling us exactly why and for what purpose he suffered and how we should conform ourselves to his sufferings, namely, that he died for our sins. This is a correct interpretation of the sufferings of Christ, by which we may profit. And as it is not sufficient to know and believe that Christ has died, so it will not suffice to know and believe that he rose and with a transfigured body and is now in a state of joy and blessedness, no longer subject to mortality, for all this would profit me nothing or very little. But when I come to understand the fact that all the works God does in Christ are done for me, nay, they are bestowed upon and given to me, the effect of his resurrection being that I also will arise and live with him; that will cause me to rejoice. This must be brought home to our hearts, and we must not merely hear it with the ears of our body nor merely confess it with our mouth.

8. All this is done, I say, by faith. For if you believe that by this seed the serpent has been slain, then it is slain for you; and if you believe that in this seed all nations are to be blessed, then you are also blessed. For each one individually should have crushed the serpent under foot and redeemed himself from the curse, which would have been too difficult, nay impossible for us. But now it has been done easily, namely, by Christ, who has crushed the serpent once, who alone is given as a blessing and a benediction, and who has caused this Gospel to be published throughout the world, so that he who believes, accepts it and clings to it, is also in possession of it, and is assured that it is as he believes. For in the heart of such a man the Word becomes so powerful that he will conquer death, the devil, sin and all adversity, like Christ himself did. So mighty is the Word that God himself would sooner be vanquished than that his Word should be conquered.
What were these women expecting when they came to the tomb that day? What did they experience? They came looking for a dead body. They came expecting to lovingly care for the corpse of a friend. Instead their world is completely turned upside down. They were afraid and ran away. In some way, Jesus must have chased them down and overcome this fear. The fact that this story is told at all means that sometime they must have opened their mouths. How could Mark tell this story if fear completely and always silenced these women? But what overcame their fear? Was it anything other than the same love of Christ which as John says, “drives out all fear”?

This is a very interesting text. Our best manuscripts of Mark, the ones everyone has to admit are the most important and give us the best witness to the Gospel itself end right here. They do not have any of the longer endings of Mark which we knew from the King James and which Luther quotes in the Catechism. Mark’s Gospel account apparently ended with the women running off, telling no one, because they were afraid. That’s it!

You can see why pious scribes in later generations might have thought they had a defective manuscript on their hands and looked to the other Gospels to fill in the story. At least that is what we think might have happened. But if this is true, then we have a rather difficult problem. What do we do with this oldest Mark?

The best reconstruction we can seemingly arrive at is that Mark did this as part of the overarching theme of the book. It is pretty clear from the rest of the Gospel that Mark was writing to a fearful group of people. If you look at the stories of Mark closely you will notice how often he tells you they were afraid. Just last week we saw Jesus walking to Jerusalem and he slips in there, unlike Matthew and Luke, that the folks following Jesus were “afraid.” This at first blush seems to be exactly the wrong thing to say to fearful people, but think about it for a moment. People who are afraid cannot be rationalized out of their fear; they need to be exampled out of fear. You can almost imagine the reader reading these last lines and looking up and staring the congregation in the face. “they ran away…but by my reading this text aloud to you, I did not!” The reading of the Gospel itself would have been an act of defiance in the face of a real and fearsome threat. They were crucifying Christians out there. What will you do? Will you like they did, run away and be silent? The reader obviously did not.

If you want a really interesting study in this, Mark most often arranges his material in his book in groupings of three. These are called triplets. Did you notice what Mark called the angel here? He does not name him an angel, but a young man, and he drew attention to the man’s clothes. In two other places in the Gospel he speaks of young men and their clothes. We are probably familiar with the young man who fled from the garden, naked, stripped of his clothes. Look what his fear did to him, it stripped him and made him ashamed. He fled naked.

The other guy, however, is in chapter 5 when Jesus drives the legion of demons from the man into the herd of pigs. There the young man who is freed from the demons is found sitting at Jesus feet, in his right mind and wearing clothes. The people of that region, when they see him sitting there, in his right mind and clothed, all beg Jesus to go away. They are afraid. The man wants to go with Jesus, and you can see why. Demoniacs have very few friends, they don’t make good
neighbors. Jesus denies the demoniac’s request and instead sends him into his own family and friends, the people he has hurt the most, the people who have every reason to hate him, so that he can tell them what God has done.

At the end of chapter six of Mark, Jesus again crosses the Sea of Galilee. This time, however, the people do not ask him to leave, instead, as soon as Jesus boat touches land, they stream to him. They bring their sick and demon possessed and place them so that even Jesus shadow might fall on them, or that they might touch his clothes and be healed.

What has effected this change? The only thing that has happened is that a demoniac went and told. If God can use such a miserable vessel to change a whole region, what can he do with us? Here was a man who had nothing, was nothing, less than nothing, worse than nothing, and God has made him something, clothed him with the very righteousness of God, and now he is the instrument for changing the world.

Will our fear keep our mouths closed? Will our fear demand that we run and hide? The women fled from the tomb, the young man did in the garden, but this demoniac, clothed with the righteousness of Christ, went out, alone, to a hostile crowd, and became the instrument of God’s power to them. What will you do?

Sermon Idea: Three men and their clothes – Go and tell. (That the hearer, filled with joy, would go and tell the good news that Jesus has risen from the dead, lives and reigns today and to all eternity!)

a. The last young man and his clothes – the young man in today’s Gospel lesson is arrayed in shining white clothes. He has a glorious message to tell, Jesus has risen from the dead. But the women run from him in fear. They do not tell.

b. Mark tells a second story about a young man and his clothes. If you were here last week or read the story of Jesus’ betrayal this past week, when they came to arrest Jesus in the garden a young man was seized and in his fear he ran from their grasp but left his clothes in their hands. He fled naked. His fear shamed him. He found himself hiding behind the bushes, looking for someone’s laundry to steal so he could get home and hide. His fear closed his mouth, un-manned him, leaving him little more than an animal skulking, hiding, in fear.

c. But Mark has also told us an earlier story, a first story, about a young man and his clothes. In chapter five the demoniac of the Gerasenes was described as “in his right mind and wearing clothes” which he had not done when the demons raged. Jesus freed him from the scourge of demonic possession and then, like these women, sent him back to the very people whom he feared with the message of what God has done for him. Mark later tells us that the next time Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee, the people of that region, who had feared Jesus’ power and asked him to leave, now flocked to him. All this Jesus did through one very broken man whom he gave the mandate to go and tell.
d. Today the young man in shining clothes confronts us as well with the same good news that rang out that first Easter Sunday. Jesus has risen from the dead, he has conquered all our demonic foes, even death itself. That is a message which opens our lips with joy.

Fear will close our mouths faster than any other thing. There is much to fear in this world today. Look at the additional sermon below. The antidote to fear is God’s love (I John) and the joy which flows out of that love opens our lips and our lives to be the living invitations to the people around us. One cannot rationalize someone out of fear. It doesn’t work. God loves them out of fear. Easter is the expression of God’s fear expunging love.

The Easter message in all the Gospels includes this simple injunction to go and tell, tell what God has done for you. The joy and wonder of what God has done is what opens our lips and our mouths to speak those words. Rejoice, then today, tell out the good news, we are the heralds of salvation to this broken generation. Christ has risen from the dead! One might pull a little from John Chrysostom’s sermon. He asks the question of his hearer, “what did you bring today?” We are going to ask the question: “What will you do today?” or “How will you leave today?” The text tells us these women went away afraid. There is much to be afraid of, that is a reasonable thing. But the angel tells them, not to be afraid. The Bible has 365 instances in which it records: “Don’t be afraid” or some variant of that. one a day. Christ’s resurrection also can and does empower us. The women could not be the end of the story. Someone had to tell, Mark told, the reader of that Gospel that first day when it was read to the fearful Christians of old was not too afraid to read. Likewise today, Christ has risen from the dead, be not afraid, is God’s creative word to us. It literally creates what it calls for in us and sends us through these doors changed for having heard it. Christ has risen, the devils are undone, Christ is risen, the angels rejoice, Christ is risen, his people’s fear has been replaced with hope. Like the demoniac in chapter five, clothed by Jesus, we are sent out into this world, fearlessly proclaiming his love and kingdom, presence and resurrection. This applies to every stage of life, even if we go out this day knowing that this is the last Easter will celebrate this side of heaven. Even that fearsome and loathsome grave holds no terror for us anymore. Christ is risen. Alleluia!

Sermon Idea: We are what we are (Gospel and Epistle – The Holy Spirit will transform the hearer through the proclamation of the Resurrection.)

The women were utterly shocked by what they found. They ran away in fear, it took a while to process this. The resurrection of the dead is shocking to us who go to cemeteries and find that the deceased are assuredly still dead. The resurrection of the dead, beginning with Jesus must change us.

Paul too was changed – he was an unlikely witness to the Gospel. But by the grace of God, which was not in vain, he was what God called him to be. He was what God made him – an apostle.

God has made us his children – we are his beloved. Jesus’ resurrection has transformed our lives into lives of hope and opportunity.
For these women the transformation of the resurrection meant that they overcame that fear that gripped them. Likewise we too find that the resurrection will not let us be compelled and trapped in our fear. They eventually were able to tell this story. We got it. They must have told someone!

But that fear can not only silence us, it saps our hope and it makes us timid and reluctant to live as Christ would have us live today. It keeps us away from God’s grace. These women had come with resignation to what had happened. That evaporated with the news the angel bore.

The muted Christian comes to church today, perhaps only twice a year, perhaps every Sunday, in the world and too much of the world. They are undercover Christians, afraid of what the world will say if they were to boldly live out their faith. Christ’s resurrection is the key to breaking that timid silence.

Jesus raised from the dead has eviscerated every threat of our foe. He may still take our life, our status, our wealth, or anything else, but God gives it back to us and more. He takes this life, God gives eternal life. He takes our wealth, God makes us heirs of heaven. Our foe makes us into objects of ridicule, but God calls us by name and calls us his children, proclaiming our status throughout the world. The devil has simply lost his teeth, at least in the big picture. He rages now, death does it worst, but all the rage and carnage is undone. Jesus is risen.