

SERMON - Mark 16:1-8
“I Know That My Redeemer Lives” (Easter)
Messiah Lutheran Church
Sunday, April 4, 2021

In a short while, we'll close this service today by singing what has to be one of the most well-known and well loved Lutheran Easter hymns: I Know That My Redeemer Lives. If you've been a part of our church for some time, I'm guessing that our annual singing of it will warm your heart (especially since we weren't able to gather last year in church for Easter). If you're a first time visitor or guest with us here this morning, we're thrilled to have you and when we sing that song later, perhaps you'll see why we hold this song so near and dear. The first two lines of that song are some of the most familiar song lyrics inside of our church body. “I Know That My Redeemer Lives, what comfort this sweet sentence gives. Well, let me ask you something. Why? Why is this sentence comforting? What makes this sentence so comforting? If I gave you a blank sheet of paper and a pencil and I said “Complete this sentence. “I know that my redeemer lives” is such a comforting sentence because... .. how would you complete it?

Maybe you'd fixate on one of the words up here. Maybe this sentence is comforting because of the word “Lives”. The reason we packed church this morning and decked it out up here in white is all because of this word, right? If Christ who once was slain had not burst his three-day prison, our faith would have been in vain. But now he is arisen - now he lives! And because he lives, that's our hope too. Maybe that's the word that makes this sentence comforting. Or, maybe you'd focus on the word “Redeemer”. The person who wrote that hymn could've just said I Know that Jesus Lives, but think of what the word “redeemer” entails. You redeem 30 tickets at Chuck E Cheese for a toy stuffed animal. You redeem a coupon code to save 10% at checkout. You give and receive in return. Jesus redeemed us - he purchased us from the power of our many sins, death and devil with his precious, priceless blood. He has made us his own. Is Redeemer what makes this sentence so sweet? Or, maybe it's “know”. We are certain that Jesus rose from the dead and that we receive all of the blessings he has won for us. It's not I “really hope” my Redeemer Lives or “I think” my redeemer lives - we are confident. If I gave you that exercise, maybe you'd fixate on one of these three words.

But Martin Luther once said that the power of the gospel, the good news of Jesus, is in the pronouns. Maybe one of the smallest words up here, “my”, would be the one that gives you the biggest smile. I know that *my* redeemer lives. Jesus died and rose for the world, but best of all, Jesus did it for me. Today, we'll meditate on Mark's account of Easter morning. And everything about this is important and beautiful, don't get me wrong. That Jesus lives is the best news ever. That he is our redeemer makes us feel loved. That we know that he is risen fills us with assurance and confidence. All of these things are precious. But as Mark records this best day ever, a short statement by the angel might be the most wonderful Easter news of all. - Jesus lives *for you*.

A minute ago I had us unpack the comforting aspects of that sentence “I know that my redeemer lives”. Let's do it now with Mark 16. How many different comforting realities are

presented here? Well, it doesn't exactly start off with happiness. Instead, it starts off with a problem. Three women came to prepare Jesus's dead body with oil and spices. They appear to have accepted the reality that Jesus was dead and gone. They weren't expecting Jesus to rise from the dead - so here they were to give final attention to his remains. And their biggest problem on the journey to the tomb isn't whether or not the tomb will have a resident. They're certain Jesus will be there. Instead, how are the three of us going to handle that giant stone? A reasonable problem that needs a solution.

No sooner do they arrive and their problem is solved! Someone took care of the stone already. But as we'll see...of all the goodness these ladies will hear and experience, the stone will end up being the least of their concerns. **As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. "Don't be alarmed," he said.** An encounter with an angel! When you hear other stories in the Bible of humans intersecting with God and angels - it provokes fear. And can you blame them for feeling that way? If we would have an encounter with the divine we'd be shaken and disturbed, too. But as is so often the case in Scripture, God and angel's first words in these scenarios - do not be afraid. They come not to scare us, but to bring us peace.

And what's the peace in store here? The reason we are here on this precious morning. **"You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.** Are there three better words for us as Christians? He is risen. We weren't there that morning. We believe that Jesus rose from the dead by faith, based on what the Word teaches us. But talk about an opportunity of a lifetime - these three women got to see Christ's empty tomb with their own eyes! How many individuals in the history of time got the opportunity to peer in and see a vacant grave? Not many, that's for sure. Good news, the stone has been taken care of. Good news, no reason to fear. Good news, he's not here.

And then, there's this. A simple directive the angel gives to the ladies: **But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'** And it might be in this statement right here that gives us the most beautiful reality of what Easter means. Mark is the only one of the four who mentions this, so it catches our attention. Do you notice something weird about this sentence? Who does the angel tell the ladies to go and find? The disciples *and* Peter. You might be asking, wasn't Peter one of the twelve? Why doesn't Mark just say "the disciples"? Why does he single out this one?

Well, as you might know, Peter had quite the history, didn't he? Peter is the one disciple who we learn the most about of all the twelve. He was singled out the most in the gospels. He's the one who jumps at the opportunity to walk out to Jesus on the water and his faith falters. He was the recipient of Jesus's sharp statement "Get Behind Me Satan". He tries to come to Christ's defense in the Garden and slices off a soldier's ear. He is committed that even if every other disciple falls away, he'll stand strong - and then denies knowing Jesus - perhaps his gravest

error. To put it lightly, he messed up time and time again. He's well past three strikes and you're out. If he would've lost his membership in Jesus's inner circle, he would've deserved it.

But what does the angel say? Go and tell the disciples and Peter that resurrected Jesus is going to meet you. He's not singled out because he got kicked out of the club. He's singled out because he needs this news maybe more than the rest. He needs assurance and restoration. That even after everything he's done over the years of Jesus' ministry- especially everything from the last 72 hours, Jesus's rising is still for him. Easter is for the disciples and Peter. Peter still gets to be a part of the club, Peter still will get to experience the resurrected Savior. I know that my Redeemer lives, what comfort this sweet sentence gives. Perhaps as Mark shows us this morning, that simple little word is the strongest of the pack.

I'm still pretty new here to Washington, to this church, and to being a pastor. Over the last several months, I've gotten to know you. Or, maybe today is the first time we're meeting. Maybe you've been here every single Sunday since I arrived last July. Maybe this is your first time in a church, period. Whether we've become good friends by now or whether we barely know each other - I think I can say this much about all of you - what we all have in common is you all need a word of hope here on this Easter morning. You need to hear these words "he is risen" - and what that means for you.

Maybe you feel a bit like a modern day Peter here this morning. Over the years, your faith and commitment to Christ has wavered over and over again. Maybe you feel that your spiritual resume, your track record of sins and offenses against God is so dirty that you think you could give Peter's list of faults a run for its money. Or maybe you have no spiritual resume to speak of, and that's the problem as you see it. "Jesus died and rose for all those good Christians who go to church week in and week out, who read their Bibles on a daily basis and pray, never missing a day. He died for them...but I'm the exception. I'm not sure I belong or fit into this." Perhaps you feel a bit like that prodigal son here this morning. But even if you sit here this morning feeling fairly comfortable in your "faithfulness" to Christ, I think this text would warn us that none of us deserve this great grace. "The disciples", no names mentioned, weren't exactly heroes of faith over the weekend, either. They argued over which of them was the greatest on Maundy Thursday. Then they slept in the garden. Then they abandoned Jesus. And Jesus had told them that after three days he would rise - where are they in this story? The first people to encounter the tomb are these three women, not Jesus's closest confidants who had the insider information. All of them, all of us, have failed our Savior on more occasions than we can count. All of us are guilty of sin against a holy God. None of us deserve to experience this joy, any joy - from his hand.

But our faithfulness (or lack thereof) doesn't negate Christ's love for us. Our sins are many but his mercy is more. Christ wants you to know that even if you've strayed, you belong. Even if you don't feel forgiven - forgiveness is yours. I read something as I was preparing this sermon that stuck with me. What if we were to put our names in here? Go tell...and...Chris. Do it in your mind

right now. And...insert your name here. Everyone gets to experience the resurrection joy. Jesus died for the sins of the world, he rose for all, yes, 100% true. But you know who's included in "the world"? You. Jesus died for me. Jesus rose for me. He lives my ever living Head. He is my redeemer, purchased and won me back from all my sins.

So if we go back to that famous sentence, I "know that my Redeemer lives, There is power and comfort in the name and names of Jesus, there is power and comfort in "he lives". There is peace and assurance in "I know." There's also immense power in the pronouns. What makes this sentence so comforting for you? Latch onto any word you wish, don't let me make you choose one or the other. But whatever truth about the resurrection gives you comfort this easter - know this. He did it all for you. Happy Easter. Amen