Easter Morning 9:30AM

Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church, Brookings, SD

Rev. Matthew Wurm

April 21, 2019

Sermon Text: Luke 24:1

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed! Alleluia!

The sermon text for the Resurrection of our Lord is Luke 24:1, *“On the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb.”*

These women went to the tomb of Jesus of Jesus of Nazareth at early dawn because they wanted to honor their dead. We know that. We get that. Since 1937 the tomb of the unknown soldier in Arlington National Cemetery has been guarded every minute of every day. This is done to honor our dead service men and women.

Drive through most any small town in Midwestern America and you will see a war memorial. These were erected in memory of those who lived and served and died to protect us. We should remember their service and self-sacrifice. On the way out of Brookings to the West we have Veteran’s Memorial. It is kept proper with the lawn always perfectly manicured. Recognized there are the four branches of the U.S. military and the U.S. Coast Guard. Though it is a beautiful memorial, over time it has become just another object in the panorama of Brookings’ constant expansion. A few people come each week, I suppose, to stroll its sidewalks and read its inscriptions. It’s beautiful. It’s a meaningful memorial, but overtime the honor it bestows gets overlooked.

Brookings VFW post #2118 was formed in 1931 in memory of George Dokken who died in the Argonne Forest of France in 1918. It is literally located at the center of town and it and its auxiliaries have supported many veterans and their families through the decades, but it is now overlooked. VFW membership is waning much like church membership. The honor the VFW means to bestow has become over-looked downtown. Brookings American Legion Hall, Post 74 is even more overlooked out on Western Avenue. Few Americans take time anymore to pause and remember and honor the selfless sacrifice of those who gave so much so that we can selfishly live.

Why is it that these once full VFW and Legion halls now stand empty and hollow of active memories? Why is it that few stroll the walks of the Veteran’s Memorial and touch the letters carved there in stone? Why is it that precious few pause on Memorial Day weekend to remember the reason why they have the day off? It is because we have lost narrative and become disassociated with those who sacrificed so much. In fact, now in many places those who bear the uniform or stand for the flag are denigrated. What has changed American culture so? Many things, to be sure. What we have lost is our victory story and we are beginning to forget the deaths of those who lived and served and died in order to protect our freedoms and our lives.

May that kind of apathy never occur here in our midst when we remember our Lord’s life and service and death and victory over the grave for us. His perfect life, complete service, and willing death is the beating heart of our victory celebration today. We keep the festival, and feast this Easter Day on Christ, the Bread of heaven. He is our meat and drink indeed; Faith lives upon no other!

But there are some, and evermore increasing in our land, who do not keep the festival and rejoice this Easter Day. They do not know the victory over the grave the Christ won for them. Others know but do not care. Time off with family and friends and egg hunts gives meaning to their days. Until the end of time there will always be some who do not know or do not care, but may those some be none of us or the ones we know. Let us proclaim the Lord’s life and service and death and resurrection until He comes again.

And here is how: We keep the festival. We honor Him who died that we might live. We go with the women early the first Easter morn to the tomb expecting to see the victory of death but instead we receive the Word of life. We remember the cross. We remember why He died and how He died. We sing with Sir Henry William Baker his hymn*, O Perfect Life of Love,* “In perfect love He dies. In love He dies for me. O all atoning Sacrifice, I cling by faith to thee” (LSB 454:5).

In love for those made by Him and given to Him, He willingly becomes the Lamb who before His shearers is silent and opens not His mouth. He is the Lamb lead to the slaughter to propitiate, to take away once and for all the sins of the people. He fulfills God’s word of promise for He is the Offspring of Eve whose heel was bruised from crushing the ancient serpent’s head. The bruise went away on the Third Day. Death had lost its sting. All it’s might was stripped bare. Victory over the devil, death, and the grave was accomplished by His death and sealed for you by His Resurrection.

Every song we sing this Easter morn is a triumphant song of victory over death and the grave. Every time we open our mouth to speak or sing God’s praise, we sing the praise of Him who died, of Him who died upon the cross to gain for us victory. That victory, that forgiveness and life that has been won cannot be taken away from you. And so you honor Him. You honor Him who died for you by remembering Him. You remember Him by doing what He said to do in remembrance of Him. You keep the festival and feast this Easter Day on Christ, the bread of heaven.

Easter Sunday and All Saints Day in November are pretty rough emotional days for quite a few people. They are days in the church year where the occasion calls us to remember those who have died in the faith. Maybe you, like me, have had a loved one die recently and you have gone back to their grave to honor their memory. You’ve pulled weeds and planted flowers, brushed off the stone and traced your finger along the inscription. You do this thinking that just your touch of the cold stone with sweet smelling and pretty flowers will comfort the loss you have in your heart for the one you miss so dearly. You honor them the best way you know how. You remember them. You go with your arms full, like the women that early Easter morn, hoping that just the sight of the place of their remains will fill your empty heart. And it all works, sort of, but just to a point. The emptiness remains and the honor is never enough.

The reason is because, for Christians, the grave site is not the right place. Sure, the one who died in the Lord has their remains planted in the ground, but that is just a seed of what will sprout forth. Their soul is with the Resurrected Lord Jesus Christ. If Christians want to honor their dead, they should honor Christ for their loved ones are with Him and He with them because of the victory He won over death and their grave.

The women were looking to honor and remember Jesus at his grave. But He was not there. He had risen just as He said. They would find no comfort there inside His empty tomb but they would outside of it and with the rest of the disciples—for that is where Jesus would appear and speak to them again. They went to the tomb with arms full of spices and perfumes to honor and remember Him but they would have no occasion to honor Him with their sweet gifts. Instead, He would fill them His good gifts and Spirit.

If they wanted to honor Him, they would recall His words and have that meal in which He said, “Do this in remembrance of me.” And they did. From the Ascension of our Lord on the followers of Christ celebrated that first Easter Day by breaking bread and lifting up a cup and eating and drinking His Supper in remembrance of Him. They did so often. Nearly every time they met.

And so do we. This honor and remembrance of Him in His Supper may be overlooked and forgotten and be fading away in some places but not here. And this is why; In this simple meal of bread and wine we don’t just run our fingers across a cold inscription of a passing memory or partake in fading memorial tradition, we see and receive the Risen Lord. We hear not just a gardener speak to us about some news but the words of the Resurrected Christ declaring that He lives and that our sins are forgiven and we are at peace with God. We don’t wonder and worry about where our loved ones who died in the Lord might be and so grieve as those do who have no hope. We know that they are with the Lord and the Lord is with us in His Flesh and in His Blood, here in the meal in which He instructs us to do in remembrance of Him.

The women ran to the Garden tomb early that first Easter morn because their hearts told them there was no other place they would rather be. They went bearing gifts in grief but departed with the most surreal joy – there was victory over the grave.

From those early women, to the first Christians, and down through the centuries now to us, we look to remember and honor our loved ones too. We do so by meeting them at the place where life in heaven and death on earth meet, the place where sin and sorrow are soothed by the remembrance this eternal joy – Jesus Christ lives. He who once was dead as come alive again and He has promised to come back and take us to be with Him.

Our lives, our bodies, even this world will fade away but He and those with Him are eternal. They will not die again. They and you, dear faithful, will be raised to life just as He was raised to life—in real flesh and blood. Here, in His Words of promise and in His meal He brings the Flesh and Blood of heaven to earth for you, for your comfort, for your joy. The war to end all wars has already been completed. Death has been defeated. The victory is yours. Keep the festival. Your sins have been forgiven and the kingdom of heaven has been opened to you. Celebrate this Easter Day.

In Jesus Name. Amen.