

**SAY “A-MEN” TO CHRIST IS RISEN!**

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**Bethlehem Lutheran Church  
Hallandale, FL**

**St. Mark’s Lutheran Church  
Coral Gables, FL**

**St. Timothy Lutheran Church  
Miami Gardens, FL**

**April 1, 2018 – Festival Day of Easter**

**Children’s Message:** *You Are Special If Jesus Is With You*

**Object:** a palm branch.

**Scripture:** **Mark 16:1-8**

**PROCESSIONAL HYMN**

JESUS CHRIST IS RISEN TODAY

**GLORIA FOR EASTER**

LORD OF THE DANCE

**HYMN OF CELEBRATION**

YOU ARE FLESH OF MY FLESH

**OFFERING ANTHEM**

The Lord’s Prayer!

**COMMUNION MUSIC**

1. Lamb of God    2. How Great Thou Art    3. In His Time

**RECESSIONAL HYMN**

Alleluia

On Palm Sunday, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on what animal? That’s right, a donkey. There is a story often told about what happened to that animal on the following day. The donkey went back into the city expecting people to wave Palm branches at him again. But, everyone ignored him. The donkey was furious. He shouted, “*The palm branches! Where are the palm branches!*” The donkey couldn’t understand it. Why did they wave palm branches and shout “*Hosanna!*” yesterday, but ignore him today?

The answer is, of course, that yesterday he was carrying Jesus. And, that’s the point. When Jesus is with you, you are a special person. Whether you are a donkey, or whether you are you, Easter reminds us, you and I are special if Jesus is with us. Amen.

DEAR LORD: On this Easter day, may we be reminded, we are special when Jesus is with us and alive in us. Amen.

AND, MAY THE PEACE OF GOD WHICH PASSES ALL HUMAN UNDERSTANDING, KEEP YOUR HEARTS AND MINDS THROUGH CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD, AMEN.

*Happy Easter! And, Happy April Fool's Day!* So, let me ask you, how many of you have been "April Fooled" already today? Did you get salt out of the sugar bowl for your coffee or cereal this morning? Did perhaps the lids to the pepper and salt shakers fall completely off with your 1<sup>st</sup> shake? Did someone in your family perhaps turn all your shirts or your dresses in the closet inside out? Well, I hope not. In any event, good April Fool jokes and pranks are supposed to strike out at our routines, shake up our perceptions, make something ordinary odd and extraordinary. Sometimes April Fools just happens. But, in my opinion, there is no better day for Easter Sunday to fall upon than April Fool's Day to shake up our routines and open our eyes. Jesus' resurrection from the tomb that 1<sup>st</sup> Easter Sunday may have seemed to be like a classic "April's Fool" experience. Three women come to the tomb. They approach the tomb, asking one another who will roll away the stone for them? *April Fools – guess, what? The stone has been rolled away already.* The 3 women then go in the tomb to anoint Jesus' body, but guess what? *April Fools again – Jesus' body is not there. Instead they see a young man dressed in white telling them to not be alarmed.* Notwithstanding, they still believe Jesus is dead. *But, April Fools again – the man tells the women Jesus is alive, he tells them to go see the disciples and Peter where they will find Jesus in Galilee.!* But, then, we remember reading in I Corinthians 3:19, "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." In other words, what these women and others discovered may have seemed to be foolish that Easter Day, that Jesus could have been resurrected from the dead – but this not foolishness at all. It was all true! ***Christ was risen. He was risen indeed!***

I like the story told of a pastor who was preoccupied with thoughts about how he was going to ask the congregation to come up with more money for repairs to the church building. Making matters worse, it was Easter Sunday, and on the very day that he thought he might be able to have a good collection if people were happy with the service, he became annoyed when he learned that the regular organist was sick and a substitute had been brought to play the organ at the last minute. Well, as the story goes, the substitute organist wanted to know what to play. The pastor impatiently said to the substitute organist, "Here's a copy of the service, but, you'll have to think of something to play after I make an important announcement about our finances." During the service, the pastor paused and said, "Sisters and brothers, we are in great difficulty; the roof repairs cost twice as much as we expected and we need \$4,000 more. On this wonderful Easter Sunday, those of you who can pledge \$100 or more, please stand up." At that moment, the substitute organist began to play "The Star Spangled Banner." And, there you have it – that is how the substitute organist Church became the regular organist! So, Sebastien, I'll tell you what - before we end worship today, I am going to explain to everyone here this morning how important it is to have a big Easter offering this morning to keep our church doors open and when I ask those who are willing to make a big offering to stand up – start playing the Star Spangle Banner – I promise you, you will have a job at St. Mark's for life.

Well, one other story before we get down to business - I like the other story told about this other pastor who got up 1 Sunday and announced to his congregation: "I have good news and bad news. The good news is - we have enough money to pay for our new building program. The bad news is, it's still out there in

*your pockets.*” Well, we will let those stories be as they may. But, understand this. I tell these stories this morning, not to get you to give a big Easter offering, though that would very much appreciated – God knows, when I tell you, BLC/SMLC/STLC would truly appreciate a good Easter offering today – that’s the truth. But, I tell you these stories for a much more important purpose. You see, sisters and brothers, this has been a rough year in South Florida. In the last 8 months alone, we have seen tragedy after tragedy - the horrible destruction of Hurricane Irma. (We have seen the loss of life in a local gym right down the street.) We have most recently seen 17 innocent lives taken at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Broward County. We have seen the loss of life 3 weeks ago in the bridge collapse at FIU. Times have been tough. What often seems to dominate the stories on the evening news and is on our minds each and every day is *bad news* – death, destruction, bullying, hurt, crime, homelessness. Somehow, if we are not careful, even on this holiest of days in the Christian calendar, we can so easily be distracted by all the bad news around us, and forget, not just the good news, but the best news of all - ***Christ is Risen. He is risen indeed! Amen!***

So, here is what I’m saying to you this morning– you had a choice about coming to church today. You could have chosen to go to so many other places today - the golf course, the beach, or even stayed in the comfort of your bed. But, you came to this sacred place to hear the best news of all. So let’s read again this Good News from our Gospel for today, verses 1-8: **“When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome brought spices, so that they might go and anoint Jesus’ body. And, very early on the first day of the week, when the son had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, ‘Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?’ When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As the entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and, they were alarmed. But, he said to them, ‘Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look there is the place they laid him. But, go tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.’ So, they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and, they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid** Sisters and brothers, ***this is God’s message to you and me today! This Easter message tells each one of us what Jesus did for you and me that Good Friday.*** It’s sad, but so many folks come to Easter missing out on the meaning of Good Friday.

I am reminded of a true story about a distressed woman who was causing all kinds of commotion in front of her bank many years ago when banks use to close after 12:00 noon on Good Friday. She exclaimed, *“How will I ever get my hard earned money that I put in my bank?”* You see, the woman misread the sign hanging on the front door of her bank that read, ***“THIS BANK WILL BE CLOSED FOR GOOD FRIDAY.”*** I guess this woman wasn’t familiar with the events of Holy Week, because she thought that the bank was going to be closed *“for good”* that Good Friday. Well, maybe you and I sometimes get so busy with everything else each year – we also miss out on the meaning of Good Friday – the day Jesus died for our sins on the cross

in order to fully appreciate the celebration that makes us shout out today, **“Christ is risen, hallelujah!”** When I was a child, my mother directed a mass choir of 100 or so voices in a large Lutheran Church in Altoona, PA. Every Easter, the choir followed the tradition of singing the *Hallelujah Chorus* at the end of the mass. When I became old enough to sing in the Junior Choir, I got to sing the *Hallelujah Chorus* too. But, on that particular Easter Sunday when it came to the end of the song, as this choir of over 100 voices concluded the song’s 7 ending words, *“Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah”* - my mother stopped directing, the organ stopped playing, the other voices in the choir stopped singing, and just as there was to be complete silence before the last hallelujah was sung - I blurted out a couple extra *“hallelujahs.”* How embarrassed I was. But, I will always remember those extra *“hallelujahs”* I sang that day, because those hallelujahs have continued to remind me my entire life long, that the joy of those *hallelujahs* still need to be sung from my heart even when everyone else stops singing. *I cannot keep the joy of Jesus silent within me.*

SO, hear what I am saying to you today. When you leave worship this morning, you can either make the decision to leave this place and go into the world and make death your final goal, OR beginning today, you can look at these beautiful lilies in the chancel, see the smiles offered to you by living people who love and care for you, feel the presence of Jesus that fills this place, and see the birds and bees, the flowers and trees, and all of the life that has been created around you by the Creator God himself who says to you and to me, *“All this life that’s around you tells you that my Son Jesus has been raised from the dead so a) that you can go out and live, b) and go out there and make the life that I’ve freely given you your goal, until that day I come for you again, after which you can keep, living, living, and living.”* Sisters and brothers, this is something that can make just want to stand up and say, **“Christ the Lord is risen, hallelujah!” AMEN?**

A friend of mine once said to me, *“David, whenever you face a struggle in life, ‘Learn it, live it, conquer it! Learn it, live it, conquer it!’”* Well, sisters and brothers, the Christian version of that phrase reverses the order to say – *“Learn it, conquer it, and live it.”* **“Learn** what Jesus did for you, **conquer** your fears because Christ is now by your side, **live** the life Jesus offers you to live today, now, forever.”

From my heart, I am saying to you this morning, my sermon this year is not about trying to prove to anyone that Jesus is raised from the dead. Rather, I am saying to you, *“The story of Jesus and his love is self-evident.”* My only job today is to offer each one of you the story of Jesus that has changed my life and the story that can change your life also. It is that story that will make you want to go out living life and singing. And, we are going to start doing that right now, by putting a different kind of ending to our Easter sermon again this year, a musical ending that offers each one of us the opportunity to leave our tombs of darkness, really *“accept”* the Words of Truth, and ask Jesus to continue to be present in our hearts this very day so that we can go out into the world and celebrate life every day! So, let no one be excluded as we sing Please, everyone, clap, and sing loudly *“A-men”* truly believing **“Christ is risen, he is risen indeed!”** Amen.

