



ST. LUKE EV. LUTHERAN CHURCH—WELS
SERMON BY PASTOR ANTHONY E. SCHULTZ
EASTER SUNDAY, APRIL 24, 2011

Matthew 28:1-10 (New International Version, ©2011)

Jesus Has Risen ¹ After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. ² There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴ The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. ⁵ The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.” ⁸ So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

Stand in line at the grocery store and chances are good you will bump into the current issue of *Time* magazine. The Holy Week cover story: *Is Hell Dead?* How can you doubt the existence of Hell? You don't have to read far into the article before it says, “Like the Bible – a document that often contradicts itself and from which one can construct sharply different arguments – theology is the product of human hands and hearts. What many believers in the 21st century accept as immutable doctrine was first formulated in the fog and confusion of the 1st century, a time when the followers of Jesus were baffled and overwhelmed by their experience of losing their Lord...” By the grace of God – we know better. We know that God's Word is inspired – Holy Spirit breathed and without contradiction – without error--without mistake. What the Bible says is God's Word and God's Truth! If you watch MSNBC TV they tell you the Hebrew Word for Hell comes from a word that means *unknown* – hence – nobody knows? There's much more to it than that! In Hebrew there are what's called roots – three letters from which you build different words. *Sheol* has to do with the Hebrew verb for asking or inquiring. It also has to do with the Hebrew word for *Hell*. It's used all the time for a place of judgment and torment and punishment. Hell is a place of anguish that comes from God's Word. It does not come from Dante's poem with seven circles of punishment. It's not a place where Michelangelo paints people he doesn't like with donkey ears. It's not a place that John Lennon can imagine out of existence. It's not a place for people to decide who's there and who isn't. What we are supposed to know and understand about Hell God's Word tells us. In 6 days of 24 hours God made everything. On one of those 6 days – very likely the 4th day – the day he made the stars – God created angels – holy heavenly spirit beings – ministers and messengers of their Heavenly Father. Sometime after the 7th day – when God pronounced everything flawless – Satan – an angel of light and some other foolish, wicked rebellious angels declared war on their Heavenly Father. Michael – the arch-angel and other

good angels fought against the rebellious angels – the demons – and utterly defeated them. Our Heavenly Father sent Satan and his evil angel crashing into hell – **4 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment;** **5 if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others;** **6 if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly...** 2 Peter 2:3-6 Hell is painfully real. It is not a place of torment to scare people into behaving. It is not a reward for doing the right thing. It is the forever home of those who die in their sins and in unbelief. Today we rejoice in the fact that Jesus died and rose again – so that we will come home to Heaven – to the peace and joy and comfort and celebration of forgiveness ours by grace through faith for Jesus' sake! Today we celebrate the fact that:

Women Witnessed the Risen Christ!

1. *The angels said, "Stop being scared!"*
2. *Jesus said, "Stop being afraid!"*

The people who loved Jesus had just spent the last few days in terrible pain and heartache! The women – Mary Magdalene – out of whom Jesus had cast 7 demons; Mary the wife of Clopas...do you know that name – Clopas – perhaps Cleopas – do you know that name? Sure you do. One of the disciples on the road to Emmaus that first Easter afternoon and evening was named Cleopas! Mary – the wife of Clopas, Salome, Joanna the wife of Cuza – these were some of the woman who stood at a distance and watched – as Jesus was crucified. Women – who along with Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus – took Jesus' cold lifeless body down from the cross – washed off the blood and sweat – then carefully wrapped it with myrrh and aloes – about 75#. Then they carefully placed Jesus' body in a cold dark cave – a grave. The men put their shoulder to a heavy stone – pushing it against the opening to the grave. They would be back – after the Sabbath – to finish putting spice on the body. And they thought – this would be the end! How they failed to understand all that Moses and the Psalms and the Prophets had promised about how Jesus would redeem them!

1 After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. 2 There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. 4 The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

Earthquakes! Last Monday – April 18, 1906 – there was a terrible earthquake in San Francisco! You know about the San Andreas Fault – and the constant fear that one day there will be a far worse earthquake. When the 1906 earthquake struck it was reported there were some 300 deaths! That's what the government reported – fearing if the real number – more like 3,000 deaths were reported – nobody would want to live in San Francisco. So they said it was only 300 people who perished – in spite of the fact that hundreds of thousands of people lost their homes and their businesses! That earthquake was nothing compared to two earthquakes – just three days apart in Jerusalem. The first earthquake was on a Friday afternoon – when the sun stopped shining. The first earthquake came when the Son of God died! God's Word says, **50 And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. 51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split 52 and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. 53 They came out of the tombs after Jesus' resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people. 54 When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!" 55 Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs. 56 Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons. Matthew 27 There was a violent earthquake on Sunday morning – very early in the morning because the Lord of Life was alive again – just like he promised! **2 There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. 4 The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.** The angel pushed the stone away from the entrance of the tomb – not to let Jesus out – but to show to the world that the**

tomb was empty – the way you open the door to the cupboard – the pantry – the refrigerator – to show that it's empty! Jesus was no longer in the tomb. He was risen from the dead. The angel was blinding bright in his holiness. The Roman soldiers were scared stiff! How foolish their standing guard at Jesus' tomb. Pilate's seal was broken and Jesus was alive. His body did not see decay. Made alive – Jesus descended into hell. Jesus went down into hell – not to suffer. The suffering to save us was all finished when Jesus said, **"It is finished!"** Jesus went down into hell to announce his undeniable victory! **¹⁴ having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.** Colossians 2:14-16 (NI V ©2011) Jesus could have his victory parade down Main Street hell – and there was absolutely nothing the devil could do about it!

⁵ The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you." ⁸ So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. The angel said to the women--*μη φοβεισθε* literally *stop being afraid* – don't be scared any longer! It's natural to be scared – when you know you are a sinner – in the presence of a holy angel. But they didn't need to be scared! This angel brought them good news! **...for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."** Don't be afraid! We don't need to be afraid of any one or any thing! Do you realize how different that makes you from just about everyone? Everywhere you look there are people who are afraid! Did you pay your taxes Monday? Did you fill out all the right forms? Did you do all the math right? Did you sign and date all the place you are supposed to? Can you back up all your deductions with receipts? What would you do if you were audited? Back taxes plus penalties plus interest? I heard the federal tax code is 6,000 pages long – then I heard it's 4,000 pages long! Which is it? Wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, tornadoes, plague and pestilence and super bugs! Staff infections – where? In hospitals! And don't even start with dentists! We don't need to be afraid. Jesus is always with us – with his mercy – with his power – with his love! Stop being afraid!

There is a new book – written by a humanist from England. As Paul Harvey used to say--I'm sure he would want me to mention his name... The new book – some 39 years in the making is called The Good Book: A Humanist Bible. It's divided into chapters and even numbered verses. *Clever – and so?* It's a compilation of humanist – *human* wisdom. It's all the wisest things that people have come to understand by means of the most painful way of learning – *trial and error!* It's all about living in such a way as to make this world a better place! There is much made of Seneca the Roman philosopher – adviser to Nero? Seneca was a Stoic. That's a person who is just puts up with things the way they are. We don't turn the heat up or down – don't open or close windows – don't adjust fans – don't monkey with the lights. We just take it. A genuine Stoic wouldn't complain either. When times are difficult you try and see the silver lining. \$5 gallon gas – you pay it – 'cause what can you do – or you stay home – and save wear and tear on your car – and have an excuse for not mowing the lawn – gas costs too much! So – learn from people like Seneca – like Socrates who said you need to do the right thing for the right reason – otherwise what do you get? Chaos? And surely that's not good for anyone! To be sure – a lofty goal – to leave for your children and grandchildren – a better world than you found. Apart from the Easter Gospel – we have nothing! With the Easter Gospel – we have everything we will ever need!

Being a Stoic can get you through this world – this life – but what happens when you die? And we will all surely die – unless Judgment Day comes first. A week ago Thursday the oldest man in the world – Walter died at the age of 114 in Great Falls, Montana. The newspaper said Walter *"died of natural causes"*. Walter died because of sin. It's as simple as that. **The wages of sin is death.** I wonder if Walter knew and believed that Jesus died on the cross to wash away his sins. It is not for us to judge Walter. That's for Jesus! Walter is in Heaven or Walter is in Hell. There are no other options. We need to share the Easter Gospel with our Uncle Walters before it's too late!

⁸ So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid.

There was a Church down in Florida that thought they could perhaps do some outreach by having an Easter egg drop. It sounded painfully like the old WKRP turkey drop. They put up some yellow caution tape that people quickly cut to ribbons. They divided the children into two groups – toddlers and very little people – then bigger children. Parents were just supposed to watch. A helicopter made three passes – dropping some 20,000 eggs that they said “looked like tropical Skittles” falling from the sky. And then away went the children and their moms and dads and grandparents. The first little people to bend over to pick up the broken plastic eggs were literally knocked down and literally stepped on and kicked by the stampede of people after the free candy. Words like chaos and pandemonium were used to describe the people. And all this in the name of the crucified and risen Savior? It is a painful picture of what is wrong with the human heart – when we act like life is a scramble – to push and shove and grab for yourself as much as you can. It is a painful picture of what’s ugly inside – when parents drag and push and shove their children – be assertive – be aggressive – go for it! And then for this to happen – in the name of the Gospel – gives opportunity for unbelievers to mock God. Unbelievers write – “I want nothing to do with a Gospel like this. I will stay at home – my time better spent than with worship even with free candy!” This Easter time – again – we are called to read our Bible – to study God’s Word – to pray for one another – to worship ever more faithfully. By the grace of God – let us witness to the Risen Christ – by what we say and how we live. Let us love and forgive one another for the sake of the Risen Savior. Amen!

To God alone all glory!

Rev. Anthony E. Schultz