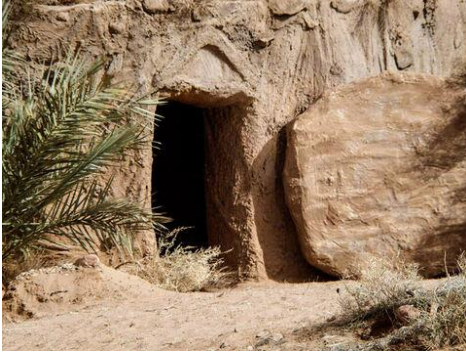


The Essential Question is Whether God Allows Death to Triumph

Sermon for Easter Sunday

Sermon Text: 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. ² And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³ And they were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” ⁴ And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back – it was very large. ⁵ And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. ⁶ 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. ⁷ 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.” ⁸ 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.

In days of peace and prosperity, the idea that there is no longer any death can come up. When I'm healthy and live in peace, death can't frighten me. I can even appreciate mystery novels and computer games. If an acquaintance does happen to die, their body is quickly taken to the funeral home for others to take care of. We have removed death from our lives but we deceive ourselves. It always exists. It's the fate and ending of each of us and in one moment, death can reveal its ugly face. This happens in time of war – then the dead suddenly aren't lying around hidden, but openly on the street. And suddenly normal people must worry about burying their loved ones in the backyard or even directly on the side of the road with a little dirt so that the dogs don't eat the body. In such situations, death is suddenly normal. And that's exactly what happened at Easter. For a while, Jesus' disciples got used to the fact that Jesus triumphed over death, sickness, and evil forces. They thought that it would go on like this forever. But Jesus warned them, it wouldn't always be like this. Jesus repeatedly prophesied that He would die on the cross. And as they had to carry His body to the grave, all the disciples suddenly realized that this really happened. Jesus died. That is a very certain fact. And all at once, nothing was left over other than the very ordinary things to worry about, like the removal of bodies. But despite death, can the disciples believe that this body will be resurrected? Can we believe in the resurrection? When we read the reports of the resurrection in the Bible, we notice that the disciples can't believe it at first. That's not surprising because when death occurs, life is clearly no longer recognizable. Death is noticeable. Its power penetrates everywhere and oppresses us. It can even be smelled. Even the oils the women brought could not banish this death. Or is there a cure for death? That is an important question. It's not just an important question, it's a critical question because with this question, it becomes clear whether life has any meaning at all or not. Indeed, no matter what I do, no matter how much money I have, no matter how famous I become, no matter how healthy I live, if death crosses everything out in the end, everything that I am and did is meaningless. In the end, there is only a dark night and nothingness! So, who will answer this question? And who will give us remedy against death? People can't answer this question – only God can. It is God who started life in the first place. And when we ask about death, it is primarily a question that only God can answer. The question of whether God can raise

the dead and give us eternal Life is actually not a question at all. Because if you believe that God is the origin of life and that He made us, then it is likewise easy for Him to raise us from the dead. Of course God can do this! We don't need to list any intelligent arguments and evidence of why and how this happens. The only answer to the question of the resurrection is that God can raise us from the dead. Of course God can do that! The question isn't if He can. The question is does He want that? When we see death and when we stand before a dead body, we think the decision has been made. "God called the people home!" we then say. And yet, we can't see this "home." For us, the person is just gone. He is dead! The women who went to Jesus' tomb also thought that. They had heard how Jesus cried out the words on the cross: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me!" And that's why they now thought: Jesus must have miscalculated. Or even worse: God abandoned Him in the end. That's a terrible thought. If that's true, then we really should despair. Then we would have to believe that God really left us to die. Then we have to see the images of the many deaths in war as Satan's ultimate victory. But it's not like that! And it won't stay that way. Death is not and won't be the victor! Death is not the victor because not only can God defeat death, but God has also already overcome it! Jesus shows us all of that. Jesus takes the path we all must take. He takes the path to bitter death. He doesn't shy away from it. He subjects Himself to it. He even experiences hell firsthand. And so He is like us in our death. He also stands by our side when death has spread everywhere and even when it knocks on our own front door. Jesus stands at the place of death and at the place of being forsaken by God too. That is the place where we are at the end of our faith and hope. And Jesus is there too! And if God stands by this Jesus who dies abandoned and lonely, then He stands by us too. He doesn't let us taste death. Jesus had announced all that to His disciples. He repeatedly had foretold what would happen. The disciples could believe the first part of this proclamation – the second part not yet. It took a while until the disciples finally understood what Jesus' resurrection meant. And it took a while until they understood what this resurrection meant for them personally. The women at the tomb hadn't gotten that far yet. The encounter at the tomb is frightening to them. They went to the tomb, mourning, and ran away in terrible fear when the angel told them about Jesus' resurrection. Easter joy isn't seen there yet. This joy first came when they encountered Jesus. Even the disciples first believed in the resurrection when they encountered Jesus. Even Paul, who heard about Jesus much later, could only believe in Jesus when Jesus Himself appeared. And it remains so to this day. The resurrection and the belief that God raises us from the dead does not pass by Jesus – Jesus must come to us and live with us. Only then do we have life, only then do we believe not only in His resurrection but also in our own resurrection, no matter who we are or what language we speak. That is the great miracle of Easter joy. Jesus has to come. He can do it and He does do it. He enters into us with His Spirit and He changes our lives. He goes wherever there is sadness, disappointment, and great fear and shows us that death doesn't have the last word. Jesus also shows us that He triumphs over everything that makes our lives sad and troubled. Not only can something like that happen, but it also will happen. It will happen because not only can God do it, but He also wants it. The women went to the tomb with great sadness. All they could worry about was the predictability of death – all of that was about to change for them. Just such a change may occur with us. Are you feeling sad and hopeless? Can you no longer find a reason to be happy? Or can you no longer see a future for yourself? Or do you let others persuade you into thinking that you are a lost cause? When that is all, Jesus the Risen One should and may move into your heart. Paul writes that the resurrection not only crosses out our personal death, but now it determines our whole life: It also applies to us – not death but life! And Paul writes that all things work together for good when we are in Christ. We can count on this Christ. When the women ran away in fear and terror, He was already there. And He is here even

now – in the middle of your life. He wants to say to you: I understand your fear, I understand your doubt, I understand that death is big and strong for a while. But don't be afraid. It is I. I am with you. I am the one who knows death but certainly also resurrection. So shall it be with you! Amen.