

✠ Mark 16:1-8 ✠

IN NOMINE IESU

This is the feast of victory for our God. Halleluiah! Death's prison doors are shattered. Hades has been emptied of its power and threat. Death has lost its dominion over man. The ancient serpent's head has been crushed even as our Lord's heel has mended. He is risen!

Now all the vault of heaven resounds in praise of love that still abounds: "Christ has triumphed! He is living!" Rejoice, O Church of Christ, for you are clothed in the brightness of this light. He is risen! The seal of the grave is broken for Christ, the Life, arose from the dead and the morning of the new creation breaks forth out of night.

Let all the house of God ring out with rejoicing, with the praises of all God's faithful people. The promise of God has been made known even as it has been prophesied. Creation has been born anew after the flood of death, saved in the ark that is Christ. The children of Israel have crossed through the Red Sea on the dry ground that is Christ. Jonah has been resurrected after three days in the belly of hell and proclaims to you, O Nineveh, the mercy of God. The dry bones have been given life. Rejoice, O sons and daughters of Abraham, for the true Joshua has conquered your enemies and delivers to you the Promise Land.

Rejoice, O Church of Christ, for the Lord goes before you. He goes before you into death, even as He goes before you into life.

The Savior of the nations has come; He has done His Father's will. He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. He has been wounded for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquity. Upon Him has fallen the chastisement of the Almighty that has brought us peace. By His stripes we are healed.

He has gone before you into death. Willingly the Lamb of God laid down His life for you. Not to shame you, to bring you sorrow or dread, to make you feel guilty, but to heal you; to bring you peace with God. To join you to Himself as a husband joins himself to his beloved. The nails that held His beaten body to the cursed tree were His wedding gift to you, spikes of steel more precious than diamond rings. The crown of thorns He wore atop His head He wore for you, o children of Adam, a garland of love more beautiful than a bride's locks of hair. The spear He took into His side He invited for your sake; a husband's life for His bride.

Do not weep for Him, O Jerusalem, for He went as was His Father's will. For He is righteous, always doing what His Father requires. And for His faithfulness to the Father, though He was hanged naked upon the devil's tree of death and hell, He is not put to shame. That evil angel Lucifer would love to shame David's greater Son, but in the end finds that this Man of men is not to be undone.

What bewilderment that cursed angel must feel! To have succeeded so easily with Eve's sons and daughters, and even Eve herself. To so easily topple us from our righteous perch so that we betray our brother, hate our friend, and worship our evil self. But now this Son of Mary comes, not willing to play the devil's game. He will not fall prey like easy Adam, eating fruit of sin, instead He fights with God's own word as if it is His! What trickery is this that God has played, the devil shouts from hell, no fair, no fair, how did Mary bear the Son of God?

Death too is disappointed with this Prophet's stay in Hell's motel. Though it drooled in anticipation of having such a trophy to display in its sepulcher, in point of fact, Death is robbed

of all its treasures, the souls of men, as this Son of Mary leads them from the grave upon His righteous robe's long train.

Hell itself has been destroyed; its fire has been quenched. Its belly knows now what hunger is as it starves for the souls freed by the Savior's victorious death. For you, o son's and daughters of Eve, the Son of God goes gallantly into death so that He might go victoriously before you into life.

What, then, do you have to fear, o women of the tomb? Why, men of Galilee, do you huddle behinds locked doors? Does the haunting specter of a rooster's call echo in your fearful ears? Are you afraid this Righteous Man comes to seek revenge for your betrayal and denial? Do you fear that your sins are too great, your denial too strong? Are you ashamed of your laziness for falling asleep when the Savior said, "Watch and pray"?

Repent, ye sinful men. For there is no end to the things of which you must repent of according to the flesh. For what if your wife or your friends knew your true thoughts and lusts, your daydreams and what humiliating role you have them play? What if you had to account for every moment at work and at rest? What if you were exposed in all of your selfishness and pride? Repent. But do not be afraid.

The Son of Man does not conquer death just to send you to hell. He does not come for revenge and recompense. He comes in mercy. He comes to forgive. He comes to lead you into life. For you, o sinner, the Son of God becomes your sin and shame. For you He lays down His head in death's dark prison grave. This is the way that it has always been. Even after a golden calf and constant complaining against Him, God led the rebellious children of Israel into a land flowing with milk and honey. The prophet Nathan absolved the adulterous, murdering king. The three young men came out of the fiery furnace alive. Daniel walk free of the lion's den.

Jonah was thrown overboard. His body stopped the raging, murdering sea. The men who sacrificed him were spared. But then Jonah came back from the deep, back from the dead, so that the wicked, even us, would hear God's Word: peace be with you, your sins are forgiven.

Peace be with you, you who are afraid of your sin and of your wicked thoughts. Peace be with you, you murderers and liars, cheats and drunks. Peace be with you, you who crucified the Lord. For He has purchased peace with God for you with His body and His blood.

So come, o fearful men, come and meet the Lord in Galilee where He promises to be. Not the Galilee alongside the River Jordan, but the Galilee that is marked by His pulpit, font, and altar. You were dead, conceived in sin. But He has washed you clean in His baptismal flood. He has breathed new life into you. Now you are not dead. You live in Christ. You are baptized. Now you wait in joyful expectation of that wondrous day when all the dead in Christ will rise and meet their Lord in the skies.

The prophecy has been fulfilled: there is peace on earth. Peace won by the bloody cross. Peace that is given to you even as His body is placed inside your mouth and His blood makes you righteous. You may depart this day in peace for you are not God's enemy; you are His people. And He always buys back His people, no matter what the cost. Your sins are forgiven, the Lord is risen. Peace be with you.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠