

# Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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April 16, 2006  
Easter Festival  
John 19:30  
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Isaiah 25:6-9  
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 118  
Second Lesson: 1 Corinthians 15:19-26  
Gospel: Mark 16:1-8

## **Jesus' Empty Tomb Shouts: "It Is Finished!"**

Have you ever noticed that there are some words that just need to be punctuated with an exclamation mark? Some phrases that you say just demand it, right? When you have a child and you call someone to tell them and you say, "It's a boy!" or "It's a girl!" Have you ever heard a parent say those words in a cold monotone? "It's a boy." "It's a girl." Or someone that goes to the doctor and they hear the news that, "I don't know how and I don't know why, but the cancer is gone!" That just has to have an exclamation mark at the end of it, doesn't it? If you go to the local Chamber of Commerce and fill out an entry blank and you win a car. If you go to tell someone about that car, you are not going to tell them about it as though it were the weather, are you? Some things just demand an exclamation mark.

As we gather together on this Easter morning, we put the exclamation on some of the words that Jesus spoke from the cross—on that Good Friday when he first spoke the words, "It is finished!" By that he meant that he had finished everything he had come to do to pay for our sins, to redeem the world, to open the door of heaven to those who believe. If ever there are words that should have an exclamation mark, it should be those. But remember, on that Good Friday as he spoke them, there was darkness. The sun had stopped shining. God's wrath was poured out on him. People that loved him didn't get all that close. They stood off in a distance. They didn't know what to make of it yet. They might not even know the full input of those words, "It is finished," until Easter morning when the empty tomb put the exclamation mark on that phrase of Jesus', "It is finished!"

The exclamation mark came with an earthquake, with angelic messages, a stone rolled away from the very place where Joseph of Arimathea had laid that lifeless body—an exclamation mark rang forth across that garden that first Easter morning. "It is finished!" When you hear it as we gather together this morning, listen, because Jesus' empty tomb shouts, "IT IS FINISHED!" What we see is that our sins have been paid for in full and our eternity in heaven is guaranteed. That is the exclamation point for us today.

A number of years back, there was a movie about Jesus. I don't remember the title. I don't even remember much of the content, but the one thing that seemed very, very striking about it was that the movie at the end has Jesus hanging on the cross, darkness over the land, the Savior in agony. Then the screen fades to black and the credits roll. If that's all you know about Christ, what you would have learned from that movie, how disappointing and depressing is that? Another great teacher, another revolutionary that just seems to have fallen short. If that is where Jesus' life ends—a

fade to black with him on the cross—if you don't go to the empty tomb and see what happened on the following Easter Sunday, then Jesus is next to useless really. Think about it. If that is how the story truly would have ended, we wouldn't be here today. We wouldn't have confidence. We wouldn't have certainty that heaven is ours. There would be an awful lot of nagging questions and a lot of nagging questions that go beyond just nagging. Did the Father really accept Jesus' payment for all the sins that I have committed that separate me from God and makes me really deserve hell? Are they forgiven or aren't they? Do I have a living Savior who is going to come back to take me home to heaven? If the tomb stays full, there is even more than just nagging questions. Then our God is a liar, because he said in Isaiah 53—*though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied* (Isaiah 53:10,11). If Christ remains in the tomb, this prophecy, what is it then? Just a pipe dream? Just a nice warm fuzzy promise that has no meat to it?

What about Psalm 16 where the Savior speaks through the Psalmist David? *I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay* (Psalm 16:8-10). If that didn't happen, if Christ isn't raised, then this is just whistling in the dark, isn't it, this promise of God? Jesus himself said, "*Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days*" (John 2:19). If he didn't rise, he is a liar. He is useless to you and to me.

Really all these "what if" scenarios were covered by the apostle Paul in that great resurrection chapter in 1 Corinthians 15. He said, *if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith* (1 Corinthians 15:14). *And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins* (1 Corinthians 15:17). So in other words, without the exclamation point of that empty tomb, Christianity falls like a house of cards on a windy day. There is nothing to it. Jesus' words, "It is finished," are not a triumphant victory cry. It is a whimper, a cry, a moan—"My life has finally ended. Enough already." If that is all that had happened—he had died and then it faded to black—then just as we heard this morning we are to be pitied more than all men.

But we are here this morning. We are surrounded by the lilies, the white, the Alleluias of our children on the wall, the banners on the balcony. We are here surrounded by all these things because we know for certain that Christ has been raised from the dead. The eye witnesses agree. The angels agree. The earthquake agrees. The rolled away stone agrees. The empty tomb is that exclamation point on "It is finished!"

On that Easter Sunday, Jesus—the carpenter's son who never owned a home, who wandered from place to place, who was despised and rejected—was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead. As Paul tells us in Romans, *He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification* (Romans 4:25). The empty tomb shouts that in our ears and it lifts us up so

that we can rejoice because the greatest enemy that we have has been conquered. It also shouts to us that our eternity in heaven is guaranteed.

Guarantees can be a flimsy thing if I am making them to you. Isn't there an old adage we often say that there are only two guarantees in life—death and taxes? Well, pay your taxes Monday morning if you haven't done it already, but death doesn't have to trouble us as much anymore, does it? Because death has been defeated by the empty tomb. Those who die in Christ don't remain in the grave forever. The resurrection truth of Easter morning assures us of that. The empty tomb shouts to us that *Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive* (1 Corinthians 15:20-22). Those who are in Christ, those who believe that Jesus lived and died in their place will rise, not to everlasting condemnation on the Last Day, but will rise to everlasting life, bodily, with the Lord in heaven. The empty tomb shouts to us, "Because I live, you also will live." Jesus' promise is guaranteed.

When we die, our soul goes immediately to be with the Lord. But on the Last Day, we know that our bodies will be raised and then that victory song of Job will also be ours. *I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!* (Job 19:25-27). That is what the empty tomb shouts to us when it says, "It is finished!"

That is the confidence that you and I need to take with us after the Alleluias stop echoing and the trumpets stop echoing off the walls here this morning and in our minds later in the day. There will come days when the Alleluias are far from my mind; when we are sitting in a funeral home, when we are sitting in a church looking at a casket that contains a loved one, and the devil comes and whispers in our ear, "That's it. That's the end. You will never see them again." At that point in time we need the empty Easter tomb to shout in our ear, "It is finished!" to remind us of the confidence that we have. *We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him* (1 Thessalonians 4:14). This is what Paul says in his letter to the Thessalonians. *...we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words* (1 Thessalonians 4:17,18).

Encourage each other as you hear the pastor speak the words, "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust" and grief fills your heart. Remember what our God says. We grieve, but don't grieve like the rest of men who have no hope. Grieve knowing that the resurrection is accomplished. The angels shouted it. They said, *"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!* (Luke 24:5,6). Matthew tells us that on Good Friday there were believers that were raised from the dead and came back into Jerusalem that next week and spoke with people. You have got to believe that is another exclamation point that shouted, "It is finished!"

Jesus himself added more exclamation points to this when he appeared to Mary, to the women, to Peter, to the Emmaus disciples, to the Twelve, to the 500, to James and then later on to the apostle Paul. Each and every time, there was another exclamation point,

“It is finished!” Jesus has risen. Hell has been conquered. And then after he ascended into heaven, it became the disciples’ turn to add the exclamation point. We are told that *With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all* (Acts 4:33). That is another exclamation point.

Then came Stephen, on trial before the Sanhedrin. He saw the Lord Jesus seated on the throne and even as his enemies were throwing stones at him, *Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit”* (Acts 7:59)—another exclamation point.

Then came Paul in that powerful resurrection chapter of 1 Corinthians 15. John and the dazzling visions of heaven in Revelations and the worship that is heaven from countless other believers down through history. All adding their own exclamation point as they live with the confidence that heaven is ours as a certain promise from our God.

Now, as you and I walk out these doors today, as we go about our daily life, as we live in the confidence that only the resurrection can give us, we add our exclamation point. We testify to the love of Christ that lives in our hearts as we live for God. Not because we have to. Not to earn his favor. Not to merit his forgiveness. But to thank him that the tomb is empty and our eternity in heaven is absolutely, positively guaranteed.