

*Sermon for Easter Day - The Resurrection of Our Lord, 27.iii.200, 10:30 a.m.
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Brogue, Pennsylvania
Acts 10:34-43; Psalm 118:1-2,14-24; Colossians 3:1-4; Matthew 28:1-10
Holy Communion, LBW - Setting 2*

J. J. !

Grace to you and peace from God Our Father and from Our Risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! ✠ Amen.

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

A blessed Easter to you!

At Easter Dawn we heard the Easter Gospel in all its quiet and deeply personal beauty according to the Disciple whom Jesus loved, Saint John. This Easter morning we have the opportunity to hear, as an alternate Gospel text, the voice of Saint Matthew the Evangelist as he proclaims the Easter Gospel for his community and, by God's grace through the Holy Spirit, in our midst as well. I ask you to listen to Matthew's voice, now, as he proclaims the Good News of the Resurrection with unparalleled power:

"After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on

it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing was white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women: 'Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus Who was crucified. He is not here; for He has been raised as He said. Come, see the place where He lay. Then go quickly and tell His disciples, He has been raised from the dead, and indeed He is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see Him This is my message for you.' So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell His disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, 'Greetings!' And they came to Him, took hold of His feet, and worshipped Him. Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.'

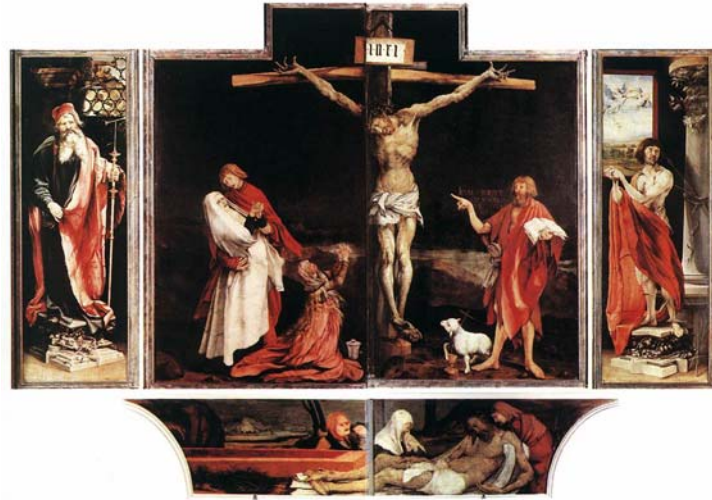
-- Matthew 28:2-4

The First Evangelist gives us a portrayal of the Resurrection which we cannot only see in our mind's eye but also mentally hear, feel and even smell. With the terrified women at the tomb, we can both hear and feel that earthquake, hear the thunderclap and see and smell the lightening at the appearance of the angel, the LORD's own messenger, and our impulse is to dodge the splitting of rocks and to guard ourselves from the thunderous rolling away of the great stone seal as Our Lord comes out from the tomb that could not hold Him. No wonder the guards fainted completely away, while the women, with just enough faith, with just enough hope, endured that cataclysm to hear a message that would fill them with a terrible joy at

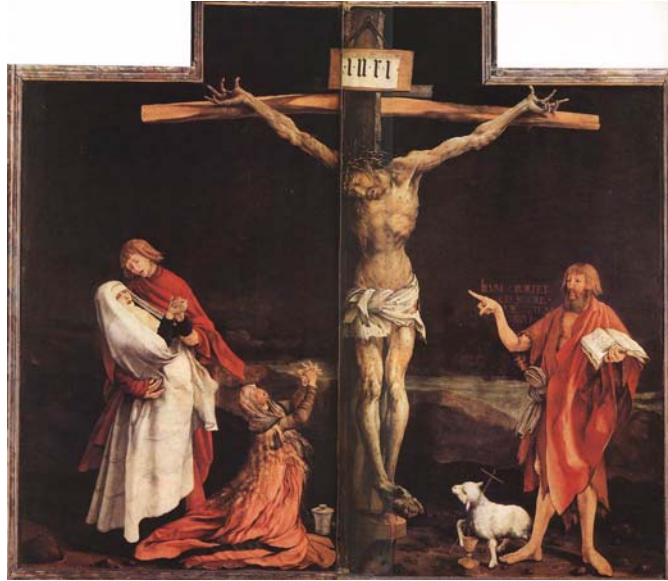
His rising, just as the Shepherds, also according to Matthew, had been filled with holy awe at His birth. What an impossible task it was to express this triumphant explosion of God's love in words. Only with the help of the Holy Spirit did the Evangelist find those words. No wonder most of us preachers steer clear of this text on Easter, usually choosing the more personal, psychological account found in John.

Can you imagine trying to visualize this scene, actually trying to express all that power of God as the bonds of death are burst asunder? At least one painter did. On the eve the Reformation, the great Christian painter, Matthias Grünewald, teacher of the much more famous Albrecht Dürer, was commissioned to paint an altarpiece for the lepers' asylum at Isenheim, near Colmar, in what is today French-occupied Germany. The altarpiece is a triptych, a backdrop for the altar in three pieces hinged together. Folded shut, it depicts the Crucified Christ, the Blessed Mother of Our Lord, Mary Magdalene and Saint John at the foot of the cross, this whole scene flanked by Saint Sebastian in martyrdom on one side and by Saint Anthony of the Desert on the other. Off to the side of the Crucifixion

scene is Saint John the Baptist, pointing to the Crucified with the words, “Behold the Lamb of God!” written on the Scripture he holds as the figure of the Sacrificial Lamb of God looks on.



The figure of the Crucified is covered with wounds. The wounds appear not as they would have been made by the scourging of Jesus at the hands of His Roman captors. Rather, the wounds of Grünewald’s Crucified appear more like sores and open fissures than lacerations, disfigured human flesh with which the inmates of the Isenheim asylum could identify. Before their eyes, the Son of God bore *their* wounds, *their* curse that separated them forever from their families and the rest of society.



The altarpiece was kept shut during most of the Church year, presenting the lepers of Isenheim with an image of God's merciful condescension, Christ the Man of Sorrows, the Crucified, and of the sorrows of those who suffered with Him there under the cross, helpless to stop His agony. With Christ Crucified, with His Sorrowful Mother and His grieving disciples the patients in that chapel for the sick and outcast would have felt an almost physical communion.

But when that triptych was opened up at Christmas, and again at Easter, all the glory of heaven was poured out upon the poor souls of that house of mercy. The richness of the color, the lavishness of

the costumes, the tenderness and recognizable humanity of the faces of Mary and Jesus and all who surround them, in scenes from the Annunciation to the Visitation to the Holy Nativity to the Resurrection seem to open up the very gates of heaven.



But in Grünewald's *Resurrection*, not only the joy and beauty but the *power* of heaven is expressed. Where God is with us in this world, free and unimpeded, no longer nailed down by our sin, no stone seal and no armed guard can stand in His way. But God-with-us, 'Immanuel' as Matthew teaches us to call Him, is not just a well-told tale or a beautiful and impressive picture. The faith and hope that caused Matthias Grünewald to give his whole heart and his very best effort to art that would be seen mostly by people the rest of the world did not want to see, the love that guided him to portray the

Crucified with the putrid wounds of those sufferers so that they could behold the transformation of their lives in His risen and glorified body is a sign of the thundering power of the Resurrection and the lightning flash of insight that reveals Christ to us in one another, especially in our greatest weakness and in our gravest need.

He can indeed blast us free from blindness and free from bondage to a future that is bound to repeat the past with all of its invincible stupidity. He rises among us where that happens, where enemies find brother and sister in one another, where suffering no longer repels but lays the groundwork for a bond, where bitterness and despair is transformed into hope, where the dark, terminal night of death is suddenly transformed into a dazzling bright and limitless possibility, because He is in that night with us, the stars His crown, shining brightly forever. ✠ Amen.

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

✠Amen.

Now may Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God Our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word. ✠Amen.

S. D. G. !

