



Immanuel Lutheran Church

Transcript from April 4, 2021 sermon delivered by Rev. Tab Ottmers

Alleluia, Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

The text for our sermon this Easter morning is from the Gospel reading that was just read, particularly verses six and following. And the angel 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. 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.”

God's grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our Father, from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This morning, we return to the Lord. We return to him because he has not lost, but because by our sin, we constantly run away from him. But today on Easter, we see our sins, they do not win. Our sin and death, they do not win, but they lose to Christ. That we do not lose to death, but in Christ, we win. Now leading up to this morning, all through Lent, we've been keeping our fasts, we've been coming to church on Wednesdays and Sundays, and we've been hearing this call. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. Today, we see why we can trust God's invitation, God's encouragement to return to the Lord. Today, we see why God constantly calls us his people to return to Him. a lost child is one of the most heartbreaking realities in our fallen world. Mary and Joseph lost Jesus for three days. When they found him, they even rebuked the God of all the universe. “Why did you worry your father and I?” Worry can do that. It can make you lose perspective. Of course, Jesus wasn't lost. He was in the right place. He was in his father's house.

As far as I know, my parents never really lost me. But then again, maybe they just never admitted to it. I think Emily and I lost one of our kids at Disney for a short time. But I think every parent does that. Grocery stores, Costco, Sam's, Walmart. It's always a danger. The store employee comes over the loudspeaker, “Johnny, return to your parents. If anyone sees a lost child wearing a yellow shirt, please let us know.” And then that eerie sound coming from your cell phone. The Amber Alert. Lost children-- they need to return to their parents. Whether they ran off on their own, or their parents themselves lost the kid. Regardless, parents don't care how it happened. They just want their child back. Return to mom. Return to dad. Return to the Lord your God. This isn't just the wish of parents of small children who get lost. Parents of adult children who've lost their way, they too desire their kids to return. Return, because a parent's love is undying. Today on Easter, the women, they heed that Old Testament call, “return to the Lord your God.” But they don't return to what they think is a living God. Their motivation was good, of course. They wanted to serve their friend. They were returning to their friend, the one they thought had been the Messiah, but they saw him die. And you don't return from that. “God? I don't know if he was God.” They saw him die. “He was a good friend. But would God have let himself be treated the way he



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was? God surely wouldn't have let himself be tortured, beaten in scorn to death. Who would allow those sorts of things to happen to himself, much less their own son?" They were heeding the call to return to their Lord. But that part about being God?

Maybe they thought it was possible, but their hopes--their faith--had been dashed. Death kind of has a way of doing that. That is the outcome nobody wishes to hear of when we hear of a lost child, a lost person. Death kind of has a way of making you lose perspective. You toss out everything else. You have the one goal; find the lost child. Mary the mother of James, Mary Magdalene, and Salome, they were returning to find a lost son, if you will. They were looking to find Mary's lost son. Mary was at the crucifixion. But she wasn't one of the Mary's who ran to the tomb that morning. They were all going to find a lost son. Not so much that his location wasn't known. But they just knew they had lost him to death. They knew exactly where this son would be found. Death calls us all to return. We started Lent by hearing that return call of death on Ash Wednesday, "from dust you came to dust you shall return." God points this out in Genesis after the fall. The wages of sin is death. Death calls us to return and no one can refuse his call.

Except on this morning, we begin to hear rumors. Did somebody not listen to death? I can't tell you the number of times I've heard or read obituaries and well-meaning people when they make a death announcement that we've lost our father to cancer. Our mother lost her battle to COVID. Our uncle, brother sister or God forbid, we lost our son and daughter. They lost their battle to death. The women would have said, "well, we're going to take care of Jesus' body. Because he lost his battle on the cross. He's lost." Now, would his body return to the dust? Like many times these women had seen death, they returned to the only thing they could do in the face of death. They returned to the grave. They too now seemed lost. Lost to the grief of death. And Jesus? Just another losing victim. The women, they of course went to anoint Jesus' dead body. They returned to do the only thing that we humans can do when faced with death. We, even in living, are already anointing our bodies with makeup, plastic surgery, botox, diets, meals and pills galore. Trying to not lose to death. Trying to show that we are not fighting a losing battle. But death comes.

This last year death was reported like never before due to the pandemic. Every day death counts put in front of our eyes on the news. And on the radio. Death counts as you scroll through social media. "What a lost cause. This many people today. This many people yesterday, and you know there's a surge coming in two weeks." It's enough to make you lose your perspective on things. Just as the women that morning had lost their perspective. They couldn't think clearly on the way to the tomb. They hadn't even thought about it, "who's going to roll away the stone for us?" Even before getting to the tomb they admit they've already lost. Was it a lost cause? Where they now lost like children looking around not knowing what to do? Like parents panicking not knowing how to handle the situation? Maybe you too know that feeling. That feeling of being lost.



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Perhaps it's in the face of an unexpected death. A loss that was hard and challenged your perspective on things. A loss that kept you from thinking straight. Like the women on the way to the tomb. A loss of a friend. A loss of a job. Or life just feels uncertain. Like a child whose parents have lost them, do you feel alone? Has the threat of death itself made you afraid that you will lose? Well, we can also be like that child who's lost because of their own fault. We have God's word, where he teaches us not to sin. To avoid sin because the wages of sin is death. God lays before us a path of life in His word. The ten commandments teach us everything we need to know not to get lost. Love God above all things. Love your neighbor as yourself. But how often do we wander? How often do we wander away from our father and, because of our own stubborn will, we're lost? How often do we choose death over life? How often do we follow fear instead of hearing the promises of God? How often we think life is about gathering and getting stuff, rather than being rich in God's word? How often we prefer even maybe the life of solitude? Life of not talking with one another, but rather gossip. That's the way of the lost. And is that any way to truly live?

The women think that Jesus is lost to death. They think they know where he is. But it turns out, he isn't the one who's lost, but they are! They don't find a manager, but they do run into someone who makes the announcement about finding the son. Why do you look for the living among the dead? "Entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. 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. 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.'" The angel directs them to return to their Lord, but not a dead Lord. He tells them to go where he said he will be. The angel doesn't meet the women in their homes. But the angel waits for them to see the grave. He lets them labor under their crosses of disappointment. You seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. He lets them come to the tomb. So, there's no mistaking the victory is real. Jesus is true God! He is not lost! Not even death can keep him away from you. See, the victory is real.

We will be tempted to give up. We will be tempted to fear. We will be tempted to think all is lost, that our sins are so great. On Easter morning Jesus shows us there is no loss for those who believe. For those who believe that Jesus Christ, crucified for our sins, is raised for our justification. Raised to find us. Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified, the angel says. The sign that Pilate put above his head as a sign of scorn, a sign of, "this guy's lost." Now, the angel says, Nazareth is a badge of honor. The one who was a man born of the Virgin Mary, in Nazareth, he lived and was brought up. The man who everyone thought had lost in death. Now the reality is shown. The one who was never lost. The one who always followed the path of life. He never strayed from his father. This one who was truly the only one who ever really lived. This one who died. He died so that he could defeat death, so that death loses.

So maybe as Christians we should reverse this. Whenever someone dies, we say, death has lost its sting. Oh death, where is your victory? The one who never was lost, he is raised to show us that we who are baptized into him, we are never lost, but found. Not even death will separate us from the love of God in



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Christ Jesus. You may think you're lonely or lost and maybe you are. Maybe you've strayed pretty far. Jesus calls you to return to Him. Don't return to your old dead ways. You are never too far for him to find you. Like a lost lamb, he will carry you. He will call you to find him where he says he will be; in His Word of forgiveness, in your baptism, in the sacrament forgiving you your sin, promising you the wages of sin will not keep you. So God, again, still calls us to return to Him. For we've all strayed. Oh, we like sheep have gone astray. We that many times become like lost kids, sometimes even that stubborn kid who wants to run away, who even plans his sin. Plans his getaway. Still, the father says return.

Return to him. Or, as our Lord reminds us, to daily repent and believe the gospel. St. Paul this morning says hold fast to the word preached to you. Mary and Joseph, they thought they had lost Jesus. But he was right where he was supposed to be. In his father's house. On Good Friday, everyone thought they lost Jesus. But he was right where he was supposed to be--on the cross, in the tomb, raised on Easter morning. He had not lost but won the victory. And now we do too. So now whenever a believer dies, we never say they lost their battle. We never say they lost their battle to cancer, heart disease, whatever. No. We win. We win because Christ is risen. We win because in all these things we are conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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