

Introductory

The reading for Easter Day in TLH is Matthew 28: 1-8. The LW readings for Easter Day are taken from the synoptics; Matthew in Year A, Mark in Year B, and Luke in Year C, with optional readings on each of those Sundays from John 20. LSB calls for the same synoptic readings, but appoints this text every year for Easter Sunrise, which we do.

Last year was a disaster with closed churches, and we're never going to do that again. Two years ago, for the first time, we made Sunrise and Day the same service, which only effected one family – and it was not mine – who would come to both services. Immanuel seems to be used to this text for Easter, so for now I'll probably roll with it every year.

Easter was the first festival celebrated by the Christians, and Christmas was not really that big of a deal until the fourth century, when they were discussing the Person of Christ. One of the reasons why they chose Sunday for the weekly religious observance is that Jesus was raised on a Sunday. Each Sunday was seen as a mini-celebration of Easter.

Other reasons include: it's the first day of the week, which is the day when God began His creative work which is a good day to remember the New Creation in Baptism. They would go to church early in the morning on Sunday and then go to work, as Sunday was just another work day in the World. Sort of like it has pretty much become now.

The American Christians have become quite enamored, and in some cases almost obsessed, over the years with the idea of holding the same service at times other than Sunday morning. Saturday night seems to be the main point of obsession. I always taught my Catechism students to choose a job or a vocation that allows you Sunday off.

In my first congregation, they had a Thursday night service in the summer for the people who “went to the lake” on the weekend. But after Sunday church I would see those people out doing yard work and in town shopping and eating out. As far as I know, not one person from that congregation ever “went to the lake” on any weekend.

In the thirty-five years since I first observed that, I have observed the same thing to be the case wherever these additional services are held. With precious few individual exceptions, they are held as a matter of convenience for people who want to get their church in on Saturday evening so that their entire Sunday morning is not lost to it.

It's why, when I was not in a congregation, we used to go on Saturday evening, so I get it, but just how convenient should our religious services be? Better to add additional *different* services during the week, which is the way it used to be in many places, when people weren't too busy to go to church even on a Tuesday or Wednesday or every day.

As a practical matter, I know of one church that holds probably 250 – 300, with an average attendance of 50, about half on Saturday night and half on Sunday morning. One lady from that congregation once told me that she had been going to church on Saturday for so long that “Saturday is my Sunday,” and how do you put that toothpaste back?

Another holds about the same amount and has about 120 attendance split between Saturday night and two Sunday morning services and try to take away any of those services and Katie bar the door! Part of that is personal preference, part of it is habit, and most of it are congregations in denial that they just don’t need multiple services anymore.

All four gospel writers include accounts of the Resurrection in their books, which is understandable. Without the Resurrection, the story is incomplete and actually ends in a sort of sad and depressing way, like Thomas Jefferson’s *Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*. I have quoted from that book, and people are shocked, I mean shocked!

With the Resurrection, the story is complete, as even Jesus says while He is ministering. In *Does the Bible Contradict Itself?* William Arndt (he also wrote *Bible Difficulties*, both available cheap at Amazon) does a great job reconciling all four accounts and helping to make sense out of some things that are pointed to by critics as contradictions.

Paul Maier’s *The First Easter* is also a good read for laymen as well as for pastors, and it is helpful for understanding the events of that day. The other two of his trilogies are also good reads and helpful. They are the kinds of books the layman can read and understand. His *Pontius Pilate* is harder, but chock full of useful information about that guy.

The four gospels do not contradict one another, but rather they are complimentary. If I speak to the issue of what the critics say, it will be only briefly. If the issue comes up in Adult Class, I will not be brief, and people will note that I am angered at the Bad Shepherds who screw up the faith of their sheep by acting like God’s Word is flawed.

In preaching, I will preach on John’s account as a stand-alone, and bring in other information from the other three writers as needed to clarify. There is a lot of different information in the four accounts, and some of it is hard to put together, which forces us to study the text in depth once again on this thirty-fifth Easter in the pulpit.

There is a place for educating people about the Resurrection, and there is a place for apologia. I have included both in Easter Day sermons, but make sure the focus is on the simple, pure proclamation that Jesus was dead, and that now He is alive. Education and apologia are best focused on in later Sundays in Easter and in Adult Bible Class.

You are aware that the listeners this Sunday may include some who don’t come to church very often. Some may literally be “Christmas and Easter” people. Rather than grumble about people who “only come to church on Christmas and Easter,” like a guy did to me once or twice, maybe we should celebrate those twice annual visits to Divine Service.

Given that a large percentage of the world's population is not Christian and have never set foot inside of a church, and that of those a large percentage of them are hostile to our religion, and that a large number of "Christians" worldwide and in this country *never* go to church even on Christmas or Easter, appreciate that they are there and what it means.

The Word is powerful, and we can maybe be hopeful that the Word can take that spark and make it into a flame. We should always clearly proclaim the Law, and especially we need to clearly proclaim the Gospel. We should especially do that clearly when people are going to be there who aren't there much and who maybe seldom or never hear it.

We should also make sure that Divine Service is presented in a tasty way. People would rather eat healthy food that is *tasty* than healthy food that is bland. They are the same way with the healthy food of the Word and Sacrament. Church should be done well, including the music and liturgy and everything we do on Sunday morning.

Oh, and this just in; Nobody has ever been inspired to come to church next Sunday by sentences like, "hey, haven't seen you in a while" said on this Sunday, or even worse, "look, the walls are falling down!" Act like they've been there before, even if it's been a while since they actually have. A smile and "good morning" is the best way to go.

This day is the most joyous of all on the Christian calendar, and that joy should come through in all that we do during Divine Service. The preaching, as well as the choir music should be upbeat and inspiring. Good musicians shine on this day. The Pastor should set the tone by being upbeat and joyful because Jesus has risen from the dead!

Textual Notes

1. When we last left Jesus, He was being laid into the tomb on Friday evening. Now it's Sunday morning "μῆ τῶν σαββάτων – the first of the week," and people don't know that Sunday is the first day of the week, and "Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ ἔρχεται πρῶτ' σκοτίας ἐτι οὔσης εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον – Mary of Magdalen comes early – it is still dark – into the tomb."

Luke tells us (8:2) that seven demons had gone out from Mary Magdalene. Mary had been there at the Crucifixion of Jesus, and she was the first person to bear witness to the Resurrected Christ. She is actually quite prominent in the NT, being mentioned a total of twelve times in the NT (WIK). The feast day for St. Mary Magdalene is July 22.

It is commonly believed that Mary hooked, a belief that came into being during Medieval times, and there is some evidence in the NT to suggest that she did engage in that vocation. Is that a vocation? At any rate, when Mary gets to the tomb, she "βλέπει τὸν λίθον ἡρμένον ἐκ τοῦ μνημείου – sees the stone having been rolled away from the tomb."

Matthew (28:2) tells us that there was an earthquake, and that an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and rolled the stone away. Furthermore, he says, the angel sat

down upon the rolled away stone. The appearance of the angel scared the guards, and when the women came, Matthew tells us, the angel talked to them.

2. Upon seeing what she sees, “τρέχει οὖν – so she runs.” These days, the desire to keep in some sort of good physical condition is what makes most of us run. But for most of human history, people ran because they were afraid – they often had a lot of which to be afraid – or because they were chasing. Fight or flight is woven intricately into our DNA.

Sometimes we run because we just found out something really exciting, and we are really excited, and we want to tell somebody about it, which is what is going on here; Mary and the others had gone to the tomb bearing spices with which to preserve the dead body of Jesus, but instead had found the tomb empty, which was confusing and probably good.

The idea – beginning with the religious leaders of that day, continuing with many of the religious leaders of our day – that the followers of Jesus had stolen His body was not even considered by those on the scene. From the guards to Mary to anybody else who knew them, the idea that those guys would do that thing would have been ludicrous.

We do know that the Twelve were holed up in The Room on Easter Sunday evening. We don’t know if they were holed up in The Room on Easter Sunday morning, but if they were – and almost certainly they were – then that’s where Mary went to deliver to them the news of what she had seen. Nobody ever says that they were heading to the tomb.

Mary, who is running, “ἔρχεται πρὸς Σίμωνα Πέτρον καὶ πρὸς τὸν ἄλλον μαθητὴν ὃν ἐφίλει ὁ Ἰησοῦς – comes to Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved.” The preposition followed by an accusative noun puts Mary in motion – twice – but not Peter and John. John is fond of referring to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.”

She says to them “Ἔσαν τὸν Κύριον ἐκ τοῦ μνημείου, καὶ οὐκ οἶδαμεν ποῦ ἔθηκαν αὐτόν – they took the Lord from the tomb, and we don’t know where they put Him.” If those close to the disciples of Jesus – particularly The Twelve – knew that those guys were not going to do that, they knew as well that others could, and would do that.

Other than the followers of Jesus, who would be incentivized to remove the body of Jesus from the grave, presumably setting the stage for the claim that He rose from the dead? When Mary says that “they” took the body of Jesus, who does she think they are? Probably she was not thinking straight, and that’s not a woman thing, but a human thing.

In her mind, at that time, what other explanation could there be for Jesus not being where they had left Him, lying there dead in the tomb. If the tomb was empty – and clearly, she has seen that it is – then what else could have happened to the body of Jesus. Mary would not actually later figure it out, but she would actually have it figured out for her.

3. Now we find out for sure that the two men were not actually heading out to the tomb, but instead “Ἐξῆλθεν οὖν ὁ Πέτρος καὶ ὁ ἄλλος μαθητής – therefore Peter and the other

disciple came out.” From what did they come out? From That Room – apparently. Why did they come out? The word “οὖν – therefore” points us back at what just happened.

It was because of Mary that they came out of The Room. Firstly, if the woman – and the women – is going to have guts enough to make the trip to the tomb, then the men are going to be incentivized to man up. Secondly, if the tomb really is empty, then perhaps they ought to go out and take a looksee at what’s up. They couldn’t not do that.

They came out of The Room, and they “ἤρχοντο εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον – were going out to the tomb.” The verb is in the imperfect tense, indicating continuous action, moving towards their destination, and the preposition is followed by a noun in the accusative form; another way of telling us that they were moving towards their destination; the tomb.

4. John seems to think it important that we know that he and Pete did eventually get off of their collective apostolic keister, and he wants us to know that once they got started, they went right after it, telling us that “ἔτρεχον δὲ οἱ δύο ὁμοῦ - the two were running together.” In guy language it means John wants us to know he didn’t have a head start.

How many different ways can John find to tell us that he won the race? Six. ὁ ἄλλος μαθητῆς προέδραμεν τάχιον τοῦ Πέτρου καὶ ἦλθεν πρῶτος εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον – the other disciple (1) ran ahead (2) faster than Peter, and (3) he came first to the tomb.” Sure, Jesus rose from the dead, which is cool, but did you know that I can run faster than Peter.

5. Getting there first, John “παρακύψας βλέπει κείμενα τὰ ὀθόνια, οὐ μέντοι εἰσῆλθεν – stooping down, he sees the cloth linens, but he didn’t go in.” The first verb has him leaning forward anxiously to peer into the cave, while the second verb has him not going into the opening. Is he paralyzed by wonder? By fear? By Confusion? All of the above?

6. Some commentators put forth the idea that John is younger – we know he’s faster – and Peter is older. We also know that Peter is the Apostle too impetuous to play it safe, and “ἔρχεται οὖν καὶ Σίμων Πέτρος ἀκολουθῶν αὐτῷ, καὶ εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον – (4) comes then Peter (5) following, and he entered into the tomb,” and sees what John saw.

7. John, who was there – but not quite yet into the tomb – and who is the guy who remembers everything, remembers in great detail the burial cloths as they found them and describes the scene. The larger cloth itself was there, intact, and the smaller cloth, the one placed over the head of the dead person, was actually folded up over there.

The meaning of all this is well stated by the Greek Expositor’s Bible (biblehub.com)

What he saw was significant; the linen wrappings lying, and the napkin which had been on His head not lying with the linen cloths, but separately folded up in a place by itself. The first circumstance was evidence that the body had not been hastily snatched away for burial elsewhere. Had the authorities or anyone else taken the body, they would have taken it as it

was. The second circumstance gave them even stronger proof that there had been no hurry. The napkin was neatly folded and laid “into one place,” the linens being in another. They felt in the tomb as if they were in a chamber where one had divested himself of one set of garments to assume another.

8. Having perhaps been emboldened by Peter’s lead – or was it shame – now “τότε οὖν εἰσῆλθεν καὶ ὁ ἄλλος μαθητὴς ὁ ἐλθὼν πρῶτος εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον – then therefore entered the other disciple, (6) who came first, into the tomb.” Rather than boastful, perhaps John telling us that he was there first, but that he entered the tomb second is self-deprecatory.

Probably not. Seeing what he saw, John’s mind raced. This did not look like the scene of a smash and grab body theft. Besides that, they were the only ones incentivized to steal the body, and they had not. Seeing what he saw, “καὶ εἶδεν καὶ ἐπίστευσεν – he saw and he believed.” The verb means not only to see, but also to perceive meaning.

The verb is in the aorist tense; his perception of the meaning of what he was seeing hit him in a flash, like a ton of bricks, and he believed. That verb also is in the aorist tense; when he saw and perceived, then he believed, but what did he believe? He believed that the only or at least the best explanation for what he was seeing was that Jesus was alive!

That same verb is in the singular; one person believed. John goes third person to tell us the identity of that one person, “the other disciple,” the one who won the race. If anybody should know what John believed and when, it’s John. He saw, and he believed, but we are about to find out that the rest of the witnesses to the resurrection – not so much.

9. Using the plural now to speak of the rest of their company, the one who was there on site tells us, “οὐδέπω γὰρ ᾔδεισαν τὴν γραφὴν, ὅτι δεῖ αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀναστῆναι – but not yet did they understand that it was necessary that He should rise from the dead.” They know that the body is gone, but they don’t yet get the meaning of that missing body.

I talk in terms of the Apostles “getting it,” by that meaning fully comprehending Jesus of Nazareth. This is perhaps the start, but they don’t completely get it until Pentecost, with the coming of the Holy Spirit. We have spoken at length about the meaning of “δεῖ - it is necessary,” as a bad or negative thing happening so that a good of positive could follow.

Jesus often uses the word to talk about His coming death, and then after that death His rising from the dead. Using that word here brings to mind the Crucifixion, and to note the obvious, there can be no Resurrection without the Crucifixion. Good Friday must happen so that Easter Sunday can be celebrated, and He had called His shot – three times.

10. Then the disciples went “πρὸς αὐτοὺς – to themselves.” With a few exceptions, the translations have them going to their homes or houses. We know that The Twelve were in The Room, but isn’t that who we’re talking about here? Not to go all psychological on us here, but they clearly withdrew from life “to themselves” and into The Room.

For those of us who have been observing Easter Sunday for most of our lives, it's an old true story and preachers maybe even feel themselves saying the same thing this year as you said last year, and in one sense that's what people want and need to hear on Easter Sunday. For those on that first Easter, it was a new thing that had never happened before.

11. While they were leaving, Mary “εἰστήκει πρὸς τῷ μνημείῳ ἔξω κλαίουσα – stood at the tomb, outside, weeping.” Her staying stands in contrast to the others leaving, and the word has positive connotations of steadfast and resolute. The American word for crying can be for crying for joy. In the Greek, no such option is in play for the word used here.

12. She is outside of the tomb, weeping for sorrow, but she can still see inside of it, and she saw two angels “ἐν λευκοῖς – in white.” The angels are sitting, one where the head of Jesus would have been, the other where His feet would have been. Sitting is the posture of teaching, and they are there to instruct Mary about what has just happened here.

13. Using the Socratic Method of education, the angels ask Mary why she's crying. She tells them that she's crying “Ἦραν τὸν Κύριόν μου, καὶ οὐκ οἶδα ποῦ ἔθηκαν αὐτόν – because they have taken away my Lord, and I don't know where they have laid Him,” She's stuck on the “they took Him,” and again, just who would the “they” be?

14. Mary seems to have interrupted herself, and she turned around – maybe she was searching for the elusive “they,” and when she turns around, “καὶ θεωρεῖ τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐστῶτα, καὶ οὐκ ᾔδει ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστίν – and she sees Jesus standing there, and she didn't know that it's Jesus,” but we're about to hear that she thought He was somebody else.

15. Knowing the answer to both questions, Jesus asks Mary why she's crying, and for whom is she looking? Not recognizing the man, she of course thinks the “κηπουρός – sexton” is speaking to her. The Rembrandt painting has Him holding a trowel and wearing a cute, brimmed hat, happily tending to the flora and foliage in the cemetery.

Perhaps He is “they.” Still searching for reasonable explanations as to what could have happened to the body of Jesus, which is no longer in the tomb, she very reasonably says to the man; “εἰ σὺ ἐβάστασας αὐτόν, εἰπέ μοι ποῦ ἔθηκας αὐτόν, καὶ γὰρ αὐτόν ἄρῶ – if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will remove Him.”

16. How many times has she heard Him call her by name, and the sheep knows the voice of the shepherd. He says her name, and now she recognizes Him. With the perception of sight, she had been unable to see Him, but now, with the perception of hearing, she recognizes the familiar voice of Jesus, like a child when a parent speaks her name.

Upon hearing Him say her name, she calls Him “Ραββουνί,– Rabboni” a word that occurs only here and in Mark (10:51), on the lips of Blind Bartimaeus. The commentators who seem to know what they're talking about seem to think that this is a form of “Rabbi” that would have been used by a person from Magdala, like Mary was.

17. He says to her “Μή μου ἅπτου – stop touching me.” That construction, a present imperative preceded by Μή means to stop engaging in an act that is currently taking place. A few of the translations bring this out; most of them don’t or are ambiguous, but the text is clear; upon perceiving Jesus, Mary is touching (probably holding on to) Jesus.

There’s no “because” that would explicitly tell us why Jesus told Mary to let go of Him, but He tells her that He has yet to ascend to the Father, indicating to her that – while it has not happened yet – He will ascend back to the Father, from whence He came. It also indicates that His work on earth is done, which He had proclaimed from the cross.

He presently commands her to “πορεύου δὲ πρὸς τοὺς ἀδελφούς μου – go to my brothers,” the first time He has called them that. Then He uses an Aorist to command her to tell them the same; that He is going to be ascending, and they also ought to be able to connect the dots and understand the meaning of the Ascension. They do, eventually.

He calls His Father “Πατέρα μου καὶ Πατέρα ὑμῶν καὶ Θεόν μου καὶ Θεὸν ὑμῶν – My Father, and your father, and My God and your God.” The second person “you” are plural; He’s talking about Mary and all Christians. What He says here is consistent with His calling the Apostles “brothers” right before this, and that’s the Family of God.

18. And she did just that; “ἔρχεται Μαριὰμ ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ ἀγγέλλουσα τοῖς μαθηταῖς – Mary Magdalene goes, and she reports to the disciples.” The word “report” is a common NT word (47X), and it’s often used when regular people are talking to others about something Jesus did or said. She’s not preaching, publicly or even privately.

And she reports to them “ὅτι ἑώρακα τὸν Κύριον, καὶ ταῦτα εἶπεν αὐτῇ – I have seen the Lord, and these things He said to me.” The first verb is in the perfect tense, she had seen Jesus, and things will never be the same. She then related to them her conversation with Him, which may or may not have been more than John records. Argument from silence.

Law/Gospel

Dead/Alive – Jesus was dead, really dead, and now He is alive, really alive. We were baptized into that death and Resurrection (Romans 6), and we die knowing that one day we will rise again, for Jesus is the “firstfruits” of those who have died. If you did not use the seed metaphor last week, you can use it this week.

The Dark Tomb/The Bright Morning – This would be something of an extended metaphor for sin and its consequences and the Resurrection and its consequences. The tomb is a place of darkness, death, and decay. The light of the sun brings life, light, and nurture.

The Son Dies/The Son Rises – The theme and title “The Son Also Rises” is a double entendre of *The Son Also Rises*, a novel by Ernest Hemingway novel about the “Lost Generation.” If I go with that title and theme, I will talk a little bit about how the 20th

Sermon Titles

Joy and Fear

The Son Also Rises

Something Happened on the Way to the Tomb

The Rest of the Story

Hymns

Sing your people's favorite *Easter* hymns on Easter Sunday, and keep singing Easter hymns for the duration of the Season.

Rev. Steven L. Anderson
Pastor, Immanuel Lutheran Church
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Resources

ACC – Manlio Simonetti, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Matthew)*.
Intervarsity Press, 2002

BAG – Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Translated by
William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, University of Chicago Press, 1979

BCLY – William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*. The Westminster Press, 1975

FGG – James W. Voelz, *Fundamental Greek Grammar*. Concordia Publishing House,
1993

GBS – Jeffrey Gibbs, *Concordia Commentary, Matthew*, CPH, 2006

GND – Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*,
Eerdmans, 1982

MGM – W.F. Moulton, A.S. Geden, H.K. Moulton, *A Concordance to the Greek
Testament*. T & T Clark LTD., 1978

MM – James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1982

ODCC – F.L. Cross, Editor, *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Oxford University Press, 1978

RNK – Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, Zondervan, 1976

RSV – Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Zondervan Publishing House, 1965

SCR – David Scaer, *Discourses in Matthew: Jesus Teaches the Church*, CPH, 2004

UBD – Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, Moody Press, 1977.

WP – A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Baker, 1930

VINE – W.E.Vine, Merrill F. Unger, William White, Jr., *An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984

WIK – www.wikipedia.com

BIB – www.biblos.com

GBO – www.greekbible.com

Digital Classics Library - www.perseus.tufts.edu

Internet Classics Library – www.classics.mit.edu

Christian Classics Ethereal Library - www.ccel.org

Project Wittenberg - www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/wittenberg-home.html