

**+ Matthew 28:1-10 + Focus on Christ Who Lives for You! +
+ Festival of the Resurrection of Our Lord: Easter Day +
+ Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY + 16 April 2017 +**

CIR HIRI!¹

Has your Easter been a disappointment? I realize that that's a rather strange question to ask on what's typically one of the most joyful days of the year. But has your Easter been a disappointment? Since you woke up this morning, has it all gone the way that you expected? Did you wake up full of energy or did your alarm's snooze button take a couple hits before you dragged yourself out of bed? Was everyone happy and excited and cooperative as you got ready or were there arguments because someone was taking too long or couldn't find something or everyone was just plain whiny? How did the ride to church go? Was everyone in a cheerful or a chippy mood or did cold silence fill the car? If you brought food for today's Easter breakfast, did it turn out the way you hoped? Will everything later today go as planned whether that's preparations for Easter dinner, the arrival or absence of guests, or a truly joyful atmosphere? When you go to bed tonight, will you look back on today and think your Easter was a disappointment?

Even if your whole day goes off smashing, we know disappointment all too well. You've waited for a loved one to arrive, but weather or car trouble or illness delays them or prevents them from arriving. How often aren't we disappointed around here simply because of snow! A parent or a loved one or a boss promises something really great for you. You get excited as the day of fulfillment looms closer, but when the day arrives, you're disappointed because it falls through, doesn't work out, or doesn't meet expectations. Maybe you've experienced disappointment in a bigger way—the loss of a loved one, the crumbling of a relationship, failure on a project, loss of a job or income, a change of plans. Disappointment rears its ugly head and seems to ruin everything. It leaves behind a terrible taste in your mouth.

Looking back at the beginning of the first Easter morning, you would think it was going to be a disappointment. When Mary Magdalene and the other Mary and a couple other women woke up before dawn that morning, a wave of grief washed over them again. Jesus was really gone. He had really died by crucifixion on Friday afternoon, and they had the heartbreaking task of finishing the burial process after their fellow followers, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, had hurriedly taken down Jesus' body from the cross on Friday, prepared it for burial, and placed it inside Joseph's newly cut tomb. The women had watched as the two men strained to roll a large stone in front of the entrance. So on that chilly, early morning, they wrapped their robes tightly around themselves and carried their packs of spices out to the tomb. Tears trickled down their cheeks as they left to finish the task of preparing their Teacher for burial. It was starting out to be a really disappointing day.

On Saturday, the Jewish religious leaders had approached the Roman governor of the region, Pontius Pilate. Of all the people to remember what Jesus had said about what he would do after his death, you wouldn't expect his enemies to remember, but they did. They were afraid that Jesus' disciples would steal his body and claim that he had risen from the dead. So Pilate gave them a guard of Roman soldiers—some of whom were among the toughest in the Roman army since they served in such a rebellious region. The leaders sealed the stone and posted the guard for an overnight watch. They were not going to let Sunday be a disappointing day.

For the Roman soldiers in the early Sunday morning hours, the day was probably going to be more boring than disappointing. I mean, who wants to guard a tomb overnight? Those soldiers were wide awake. They had been trained to stand watch on guard duty even to the point of death, even there.

Now imagine if those ladies who had followed Jesus had shown up with the Roman soldiers still standing guard, the stone still sealed and blocking the entrance, and Jesus' body still in the tomb. It wouldn't just be a disappointing day. That Sunday would have been the most tragic day in human history. Jesus' enemies on earth and in hell would've been joyfully satisfied because Jesus didn't keep his promise. The Roman soldiers would've gone on their way. The women would've finished burying Jesus as his body decayed. The disciples would've stayed behind locked doors, but what about us?

There would be no Easter celebrations, no glorious hymns, no festive worship services, no famous works of art or glorious pieces of music about Christ, no Christian churches or congregations or Christians. We probably wouldn't be here or as the Apostle Paul in his first letter to the Christians in the city of Corinth described it. ***"If***

¹ "Christ is risen!" "He is risen indeed!" This is known as the *Paschal Greeting*, one of the oldest and most widespread traditions in the Christian church. Throughout the weeks of the Easter season, whenever the minister says to the people, "Christ is risen!", they respond loudly and boldly, "He is risen indeed!"

Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith...And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all people.” (1 Corinthians 15:14, 16-18) How pathetic and tragic and disappointing this day would be if Christ had not been raised from the dead!

...But that's not what happened, is it? When the grieving women arrived, they didn't find the soldiers guarding the way. They didn't find the stone blocking the entrance or even sealed. They certainly did not find the body of Christ decaying away on the slab inside his temporary tomb. Instead they found burial cloths lying neatly where Jesus' body had been placed, and they found an angel from heaven with a message that removed all disappointment. ***“Don't be afraid, because I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here. For he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples...”***

What did the women discover? **CIR HIRI!** They didn't see Jesus at all in that tomb, but Easter would never be a disappointment for them again. Why? **CIR HIRI!** You see, after starting out the day pounded with waves of grief, suddenly everything changed! To be honest, they didn't know what to think. They were overjoyed at this life-changing news, but they had just seen a holy angel! That was actually pretty terrifying. With muddled minds, they started running back to the disciples, when suddenly their eyes fixed on a familiar face—a face of love and peace and comfort and compassion, the face of their living Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And what did they do? They fell at his nail-scarred feet and worshiped him. And what did Jesus say? ***“Do not be afraid.”*** Easter would never, ever be a disappointment for them again because **CIR HIRI!**

You know who was disappointed that first Easter morning? Jesus' enemies. Remember those big, tough soldiers? Well, before the women arrived, ***“there was a violent earthquake”*** followed by the appearance of that glorious, holy angel from heaven. That angel had come on behalf of God himself to reveal why Jesus' enemies in hell and on earth should and would be disappointed forever. He came down from heaven and rolled back that big, heavy stone without a grunt revealing an empty tomb. And what did those big, tough soldiers do? They shook so hard with terror that they fainted and ***“became like dead men.”*** Eventually those big, tough soldiers went running to Jesus' earthly enemies, who could only try to cover up the reality of the resurrection with bribes, lies...and a whole lotta disappointment. Now if they were disappointed, how badly do you think Satan and all his minions in hell felt that Easter morning? Their terrible disappointment will never end because **CIR HIRI!**

How about you this Easter? Has your Easter been a disappointment? Will it be a disappointment when you go to bed tonight? Maybe you were already feeling disappointed before you even woke up this morning. The truth is, disappointment will come to all of us in some way, shape, or form in the future.

...But why is that? Why do you and I face disappointment? Why do we disappoint others and they disappoint us? Why are you and I so like those women overwhelmed with wave upon wave of fear and terror or grief and sorrow or shame and guilt or disappointment after disappointment? The reason is something that Scripture calls sin. It's a rot, a cancer, a gangrene, a curse that has plagued the life of every single man, woman, and child since our first parents walked the earth. It turns your focus away from God and his holy will for your life towards yourself and your own selfish will for your life. It infects every word, every action, every thought that you have and that everyone else has. When the entire world for thousands of years is infected with that curse called sin, what happens? Disappointment. Fear. Terror. Sorrow. Pain. Shame. Guilt. Grief, and finally death. Any of those sound familiar? They are as familiar for me as they are for you. So in many ways, you and I go through this life like those women traveling to Jesus' tomb always expecting to find death and a dead Jesus at the end of our journey.

...But then you finally make your way to the tomb and what do you find? The Roman soldiers are long gone. The seal on the stone is broken. The big, heavy stone is rolled away, and there is no dead Jesus lying on the burial slab. The tomb is empty, just as Jesus promised, and you hear the words of the angel transform your Easter disappointment into Easter joy. ***“Don't be afraid, because I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified for you and your sin. He is not here. For he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.”*** What do you find in that empty tomb? **CIR HIRI!** You run with the women in the confusion of fear and joy and what do you see? A familiar face full of love and forgiveness and peace and comfort for your soul, and suddenly your fear and your worry and your shame and your guilt and your sorrow and your grief disappear. Why? **CIR HIRI!**

Earlier this year I had the opportunity to follow the steps of Jesus in Jerusalem one evening from the place of his betrayal in Gethsemane to the traditional site of the high priest's home to the place where Jesus stood before the Roman governor Pilate to the place where he was crucified. But my favorite stop was the final stop. As we entered the courtyard of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher—the likely location where Jesus' tomb once stood, the bells of the church began to ring and peal and clang over and over for several minutes. It was one of the most beautiful sounds I have ever heard and ever will. I'm not really sure why they were ringing that evening, but as their beautiful music faded into the night, the professor who was leading our evening walk read to us this account of what the women found on that Easter morning—and it was even more beautiful than all those bells ringing. Why? **CIR HIRI!**

Because Jesus lives, when you face fear and terror, confusion and uncertainty, he has peace for your soul. When you face grief and sorrow and the reality of death, he has comfort for your soul. When you face shame and guilt for your sin, he has forgiveness for your soul. When you face disappointment in this life, Jesus has joy for your soul. That Jesus lives for you. **CIR HIRI!** Alleluia! Amen!