

To Assure Fearful Hearts

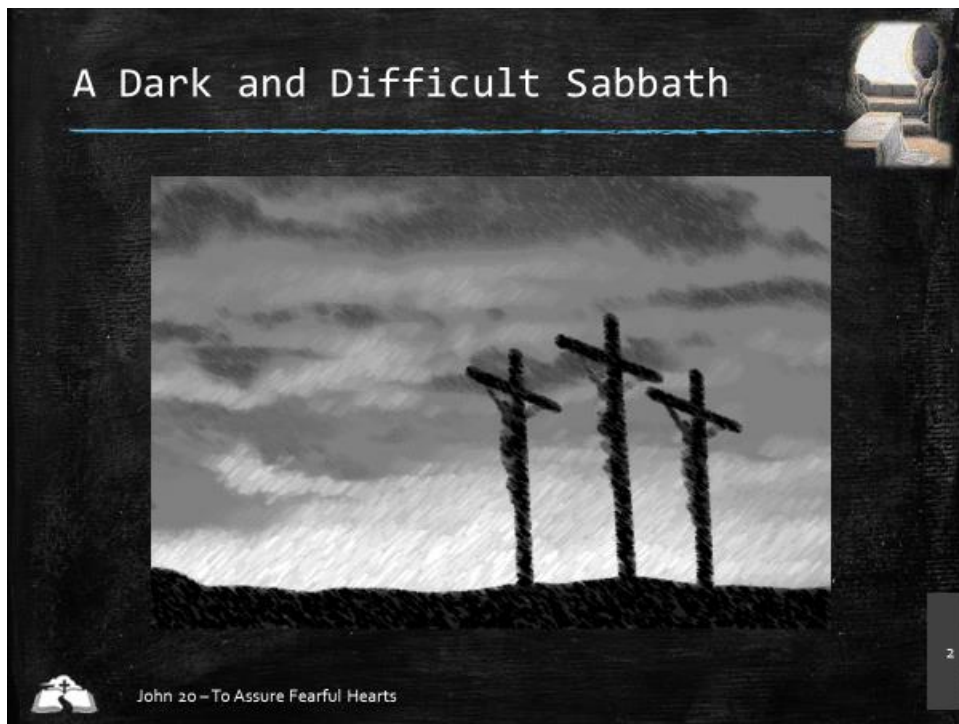
John 20

Apr. 16, 2017 AM

Speaker: Pastor Mark Schindler



Last Sunday morning Pastor Tim took us through Luke 23 and the account of the crucifixion of Jesus. Looking back from the vantage point of 2,000 plus years, we can see beyond the darkness of that day knowing that Jesus' death on the cross is our salvation. But as it happened, for those close to Jesus, the last 24 hours were full of unimaginable grief and disappointment that left them numb and bewildered.



Imagine seeing Jesus tortured body as he dragged himself up the narrow streets of Jerusalem. Imagine listening as the people mocked and jeered and seeing the soldiers mistreat Jesus as he hung on the cross. We would understand why Jesus' followers would stand back, away from the crowds as they watched their leader slowly die the brutal death of a criminal. Surprisingly, in the middle of the afternoon Jesus gives up His life. His side is pierced to remove all doubt that He is dead. As the sabbath was just hours away and with it the restriction from working, they receive permission to take his body down from the cross and quickly bury Him in a nearby tomb before the sun goes down. To the disciples and friends of Jesus, the rapid pace at which these events took place must have seemed surreal.

By the time the sun set and marked the start of the sabbath they would have all dispersed to rest; although I cannot imagine it was a day in which they took much comfort. Thoughts and fears would have raced through their minds. Would the Jewish leaders come after them? What would they do now that Jesus was dead? How could the Messiah have died? Would the Jewish leaders or Romans take His body from the tomb? For most of them, that sabbath day must have crawled by, leaving them to the darkness and agony of their own thoughts. A day they must have reflected and mourned the loss of one they thought to be a mighty prophet of God who had come to redeem the nation of Israel. You see, for all they had been taught by Jesus, they still did not fully understand His real mission.

Another sleepless night crept into another day. But it is a new day and it is a new week. They have not realized it yet, but the cross is not the end of God's plan to save. Jesus' death does not stand alone in redemption's story. For out of darkness and defeat there will come light and victory. And out of death and despair there will come life and hope. And as certain as the death of Jesus upon that cross, so is the certainty of His resurrection from the tomb. And it is this day that will transform this discouraged and doubting band of His followers into men and

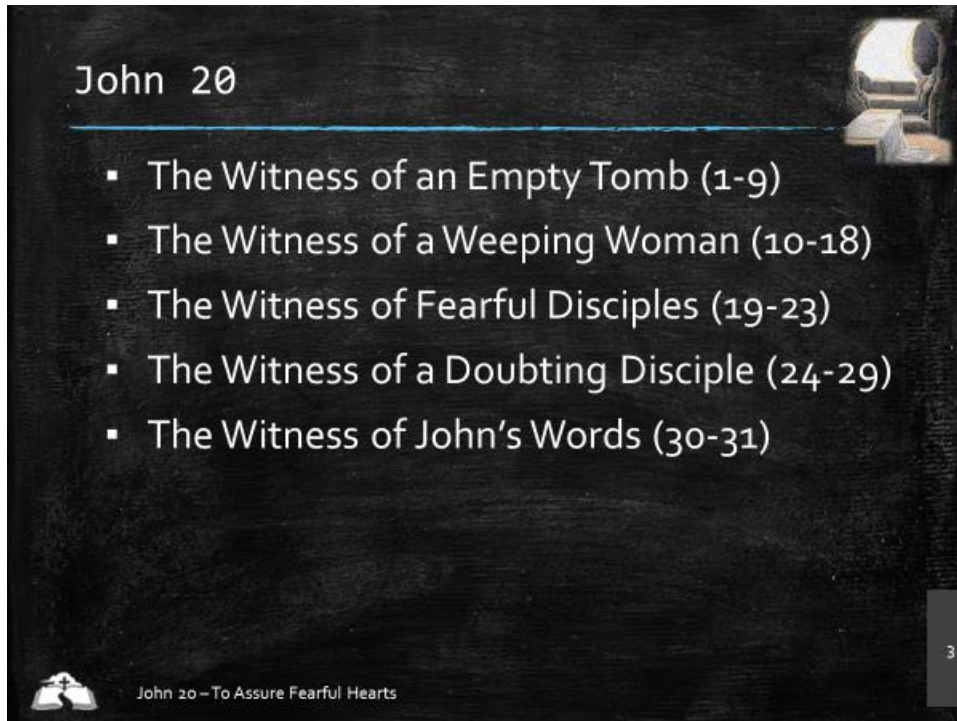
women of faith. And it is the event of this day that has been celebrated by all believers, year after year. This day, brothers and sisters, is Resurrection Sunday.

It is the original Resurrection Sunday where our passage this morning from John, Chapter 20 picks up. John records for us five witnesses that attest to the resurrection of Jesus from a decisive death. Some of these witnesses would have been surprising to John's readers. Some of these witnesses did not fully understand what they were seeing at the time. For early Christians, a faithful record of Jesus' victory over death provided not only confirmation and strength, but likely caused some to believe. Even more so today, these witnesses and the changes this event had upon Jesus' followers confirms His claim to be Messiah and God. For as Paul writes in 1 Cor. 15:14, that if Christ has not been raised from the dead our faith is in vain.

Turn to John, Chapter 20. This is God's word to us this morning. Please follow along as I read our text this morning.

20 Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. 2 So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." 3 So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. 4 Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, 7 and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. 8 Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; 9 for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. 10 Then the disciples went back to their homes. 11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. 12 And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. 13 They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." 14 Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). 17 Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" 18 Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"—and that he had said these things to her. 19 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." 24 Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the

other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." 26 Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." 30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.



John 20

- The Witness of an Empty Tomb (1-9)
- The Witness of a Weeping Woman (10-18)
- The Witness of Fearful Disciples (19-23)
- The Witness of a Doubting Disciple (24-29)
- The Witness of John's Words (30-31)

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John's first witness is not that of a person, but rather a place. In verses 1 through 9, he takes us to the tomb where Jesus had been buried. John begins by establishing that it is the first day of the week. This is interesting because although it is the third day since Jesus was crucified, the emphasis here is on it being a Sunday. It is also in the early hours of the morning while it was still dark. In this first set of verses we find that Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb. The restrictions of the Sabbath rest are now over and she makes her way to the place Jesus was buried before the morning dawn. The setting of the darkness and night connect us to the darkness and heaviness of the events of the last few days. Mary is not on a mission of gladness. She is on a mission filled with sadness.

John does not tell us why she heads out or what she hopes to accomplish. But we know from Luke's accounts that the women had prepared ointments and spices and were bringing them to the tomb. From this we know that they expected to find a dead body. You do not bring ointments and spices meant to cover the stench of decaying flesh to someone you expect to be alive. So

imagine her surprise when she arrives at the tomb and sees that the stone is rolled away. Imagine her grief as she concludes that someone has taken Jesus' body from the tomb.

We see in verse 2 that she is disturbed by what she finds. She runs to find Peter and John to let them know her concern that the body has been moved. After hearing this, Peter and John run as fast as they can to the tomb. John is apparently the better runner of the two and arrives at the tomb first. He stops at the opening to the tomb and in verse 5 John reveals the most important element of the tomb's witness. It is not what he sees, but what he doesn't see. The body is gone. However, the cloths the body was wrapped in are neatly laid out. In verse 6 we see that Peter soon arrives and true to his impulsive nature, goes past John at the entrance and into the tomb and finds the grave clothes as well. Peter sees the same scene as John. Jesus' body is gone.

The passage ends in verses 8 and 9 with John following Peter into the empty tomb. The witness of the empty tomb sparks the beginning of belief within John. Faith is ignited and John records that he saw and believed. Though neither he nor Peter fully understood that Jesus must rise from the dead, as the morning dawns so the realization that Jesus was no longer dead dawns within John. The witness of the empty tomb gives rise to seeds of faith that Jesus has risen.

The importance of an empty tomb should not be lost on us today. The witness of the empty tomb gives testimony to the awesome power of God. On that day Old Testament prophecy was fulfilled. On that day Jesus' own predictions about rising from the dead came true. Just as His righteousness and death are ours. So on that resurrection day, his new life was our new life. His bodily resurrection assures us that just as death could not hold him in the grave, neither can death hold those who have been raised with Him. Praise God, the tomb is empty and death no longer has dominion over us.

John's second witness is a weeping woman full of sorrow. This woman is Mary Magdalene. Look at verses 10 through 18. There are a few interesting aspects to this section of our passage. First, we see in verse 10 that Peter and John return to their homes. In contrast, as they are journeying home, Mary is making her way back to the tomb. Mary does not know what Peter and John have seen. Second, the idea of a woman as a witness would have been unusual to John's readers. In that day, the testimony of a woman was not admissible evidence in a court. Such is God's way, to use what seems foolish to the world as a part of His plan to convey the good news of His risen Son.

In verse 11, John picks up the witness of Mary. She is standing outside the tomb weeping. When she finally looks into the tomb she is surprised to see two men sitting there dressed in white. They ask her the reason for her grief and we learn that her sadness stems from not knowing where Jesus was taken. She still takes Him for dead and the loss of His body adds to her great sorrow.

Perhaps in verse 14, Mary becomes aware of another person nearby and turns to look, but she does not recognize him. Maybe her eyes were full of tears or she could have had her head down and was not able to see his face. Whatever the reason, she does not recognize this man who has appeared. He gently asks her why she is crying and whom she is looking for. Thinking him to be

caretaker of the garden she again asks where Jesus has been taken. And with but the utterance of her name, Jesus calls out to her and she recognizes Him. Fear and sorrow are transformed into joy and delight as she recognizes him.

Finally, in verses 17 and 18, Jesus gives Mary a message for the disciples. She is to go to them and tell them that he is ascending to the Father. This message is meant to let the disciples know that though he has risen from the dead he will soon be returning to be with God the Father. Mary goes off to give them this message and to tell them that she has seen Jesus the Lord.

Mary's witness to the risen Lord is such a wonderful scene. At her lowest point, when blinded by tears of sorrow and numb with terrible grief, Jesus appears and utters her name. And in that moment, all fear and despair are swept away as she recognizes her Lord. Mary has seen the risen Lord and will never be the same again.

John's next witness is a room full of fearful disciples. Let's look at verses 19 to 23. John writes that on the evening of that first Resurrection Sunday, the disciples were gathered together behind locked doors. The locked doors have a dual significance. First, John tells us in verse 19 that the disciples were in fear of the Jews. You can imagine how quickly the news of the empty tomb would have spread amongst the disciples and would quickly do the same in Jerusalem. If the Jewish leaders had killed Jesus and taken away His body, then it was natural to think that the disciples could be targeted next. So as they gathered together they took the precaution of securing the doors as means of protection.

But the locked doors also serve to demonstrate the new nature of Christ's resurrected body. The locked doors had no power to keep Jesus out of the room. And as they gathered, no doubt talking about the empty tomb, Jesus appears in the room with them with the words, "Peace be with you." Such irony that in the midst of their fear and maybe even a little panic, Jesus reassures them with a greeting of peace.

In verse 20, Jesus shows them the wounds from the nails and his pierced side. While others who had been crucified could show the wounds from the nails, only Jesus could show the wound on His side. There could be no doubt. The man who had appeared in their midst was Jesus, risen from the grave. Fear turned to gladness as they greeted their Lord.

Verses 21 through 23 show Jesus greeting them again and giving them instructions to go out into the world. His mission is now their mission. To spread the news of God's kingdom. And with blessings, instructions, and encouragement he leaves them so convinced of His resurrection that they will be persecuted and nearly all of them martyred for their faith. No longer men of fear, the resurrection transformed them into men who would witness and sacrifice their lives because they believed Jesus was raised from the dead.

Thomas is John's next witness. One of the remaining eleven disciples, we see in verses 24 to 29, had been absent at their previous gathering and now enters the room sometime after Jesus had departed. Thomas arrives to find the other disciples excitedly talking about seeing Jesus. Yet even upon hearing their amazing story, he is not so easily convinced of its truth. Verses 24 and 25 depict a stubborn Thomas and no matter how much they try to convince him, he refuses to

believe unless he can see the wounds for himself. And while he only demands the same evidence that convinced the other disciples to believe, his heart is either too prideful or too fearful to believe. You can almost read between the lines and hear John saying, Oh Thomas, be careful what you wish for.

In verse 26, John moves us forward in time. According to commentaries, the eight days here is likely inclusive of the first Resurrection Sunday and therefore takes us to the next Sunday after Jesus rises from the dead. The disciples are again meeting together and this time with Thomas. As before, despite locked doors, Jesus appears before them with the same greeting. He then turns to Thomas and tells him to place his fingers into the nail holes and into his side just as he had demanded in order to believe.

Can you imagine being Thomas at that moment? Singled out by Jesus in front of all the others. He calls to Thomas in effect saying, "Stop your unbelief and believe in me." Time probably would seem to have stood still as Thomas examined the hands and side of Jesus. But in that moment, verse 28 reveals that Thomas now realizes that it is truly Jesus who stands before him and he answers, "My Lord and my God". Thomas' confession is the strongest of all the witnesses in this passage. It is a personal testimony of a doubt turning into faith as he acknowledges Jesus' authority and His divinity. Thomas' unbelief has been transformed to true belief. Thomas sees the risen Jesus and recognizes Him as his Lord and God.

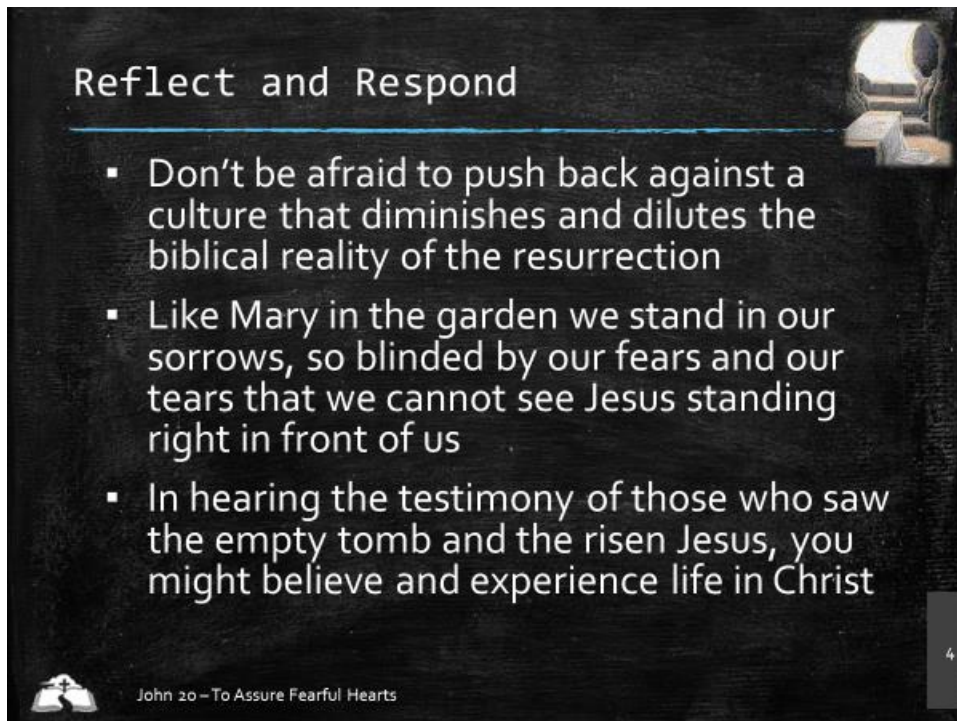
John's last witness like the first is not a person. It is the testimony of his entire gospel. The last two verses, 30 and 31, give the purpose behind John's writing this book. The intent of all these witnesses, and the larger context of his entire gospel, is that we might believe. Just as in verse 29, where Jesus commends Thomas for his belief. But then commends even more, those who believe without having physically seen the risen Lord. This would include nearly all of John's readers, from those who heard them then to those who read these words today. Many who have not seen will believe the witness and testimony of the resurrection found in scripture. Blessed are those who believe in an empty tomb and risen Lord.

In verse 30 John notes that Jesus did many other wondrous signs that he did not record. The conclusion here is that first, what John has recorded was intended for us to have true belief in Jesus. Even having not seen, we can trust the evidence and record of scripture. But perhaps John is also telling us that the greatest sign is the resurrection of Jesus. Just as His resurrection and His bodily appearance had a transformational impact upon Jesus' followers, so should it compel us to faith and belief in a risen Lord.

Verse 31 is easily identified as the purpose of John's gospel. Yet its inclusion at the end of this passage should not be lost in the immediate context. These witnesses testify to the transformational nature of Jesus' resurrection. It assures us that Jesus was indeed the prophesied Messiah. It assures us that Jesus is the risen One; Lord over all. He is both God's Son and God himself. He has defeated death and the power of sin. The resurrection is the greatest assurance that Jesus fulfilled and accomplished all that had been promised.

And if all this is true, then we may have faith and assurance, believing that He has saved us and that we will one day be raised up with Him with new bodies and join Him in glory for all of

eternity. For according to the last verse in this passage, those who through faith believe in His name shall also have life in His name forever more. Brothers and sisters, we need not fear death or sickness or sorrow or the power of men or any other thing. Jesus has risen and He brings us a peace and hope that conquers all. And if He has surely risen, then He will surely come again and we shall be like Him and with Him throughout all eternity.



Reflect and Respond

- Don't be afraid to push back against a culture that diminishes and dilutes the biblical reality of the resurrection
- Like Mary in the garden we stand in our sorrows, so blinded by our fears and our tears that we cannot see Jesus standing right in front of us
- In hearing the testimony of those who saw the empty tomb and the risen Jesus, you might believe and experience life in Christ

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Let me wrap this up. So here we are; another Resurrection Sunday, another Resurrection message. And while there is value in the repetition and cycles of our lives, the danger is that they begin to lose their significance. In the midst of a culture that celebrates the Easter bunny, egg hunts, and candy, we can easily lose a sense of importance and participation in the reality of the original resurrection. Let me encourage you, young and old alike. **Don't be afraid to push back against a culture that diminishes and dilutes the biblical reality of the resurrection.** It is good to remember what God has done and to remind ourselves, our children, and others that we serve a risen Lord.

We also live in a fallen world. Sin, sickness, and sorrow are a part of our lives. And at times they overwhelm us. **Causing us to forget the goodness and power of our loving and mighty God. Like Mary in the garden we stand in our sorrows, so blinded by our fears and our tears that we cannot see Jesus standing right in front of us.** Let me encourage you today. Lift up your head and hear the voice of your risen Savior reassuring you and calling your name. Jesus is there through His word and His people offering you strength and hope to make it through each day. If He has conquered sin and death, then His power is sufficient to carry you through the troubles of this world.

We also live in a world where not all have found faith and belief in Jesus, the risen Lord. If you do not believe in a crucified, buried, and risen Jesus this morning, then you are lost and will

experience an eternity separated from Him. I truly hope that this message has made you feel uncomfortable in some way. But let me also encourage you to examine your heart and consider the witnesses to the resurrection that we have just read about in John 20. These words were written so that you might believe. That in hearing the testimony of those who saw the empty tomb and the risen Jesus, you might believe and experience life in Christ. Jesus' victory over the power of sin is yours. Jesus' victory over death brings the assurance of life eternal. There is no better time than this resurrection Sunday to reach out to someone who can explain the Gospel to you.

Do not let this be just another Resurrection Sunday. May the wonder and awe of our risen Lord fall fresh upon us and humble the hearts of those who truly believe. May the witness and testimony of His word fill our hearts and strengthen our faith that we may live for God's glory more fervently than before. May we find rest from fears and sorrows when we find a blessed assurance that comes only from our risen Lord. The tomb is empty. You will not find Him there. The power of sin has been broken. Death could not contain Him in the grave. Brothers and sisters, He is not here. He has risen. He has risen indeed.

[closing prayer]

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