



**Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue
in the City of New York**

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Sunday, April 20, 2003

The Sunday of the Resurrection: Easter Day

*Solemn Eucharist
at 11am*

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A Sermon by

The Reverend Andrew C. Mead, Rector

on

Saint Mark 16:18

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JESUS IS RISEN – AND SO ARE WE

Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen, he is not here; see the place where they laid him.

Alleluia, Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia.

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

In the name of our crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ, I am delighted to welcome you to our continuing celebration of Easter. Welcome to those of you who have been with us faithfully all through Lent and Holy Week. Welcome to our Sunday regulars. Welcome to our Sunday irregulars. Welcome to our occasional visitors and friends. Welcome to the seekers and the curious, including tourists.

Easter is for all of us. To borrow a fine sentiment from a great preacher of the early Church, Easter is the feast which the loving Father has prepared for both his faithful and his prodigal sons! The fatted calf had been prepared and the table is set. Let me explain what the feast is about.

Jesus of Nazareth inspired great multitudes of people – as he continues to do – through his life of teaching about the Kingdom of God, doing works and signs of love which illustrated that Kingdom and showed that he himself truly is the King of that Kingdom.

Jesus always knew that his mission and ministry would lead to a deadly clash with the forces of evil, evil which infects human life, including the institutions of religion and politics. That clash would, he said, bring his condemnation and death.

Jesus' disciples, including the leaders, even Peter the chief of them, resisted this forecast. But Jesus knew it was necessary. It was not that he wanted to die; rather, it was that he knew it was necessary to take his life's work of grace and healing right into the dark heart of what is wrong with us – our self-willed separation from God.

In the four Gospels of the New Testament, as much attention is devoted (from four different perspectives) to the last few days of Jesus' life as is given to the rest of his entire ministry, indeed to the rest of his earthly life. That is because Jesus' suffering and death is the climax and completion of all his life's work. To the world, his crucifixion looks like a terrible defeat. In fact it is his finest hour, his victory over sin and death. Among his last words on the cross were, "It is finished," meaning, It is accomplished.

Jesus' disciples had dreaded his prophecy of his death, and they were shocked and appalled by his crucifixion. His body was taken down from the cross Friday evening and left to rest on the Sabbath, Saturday. Early in the morning near dawn on the third day, Sunday, some women disciples came to the tomb to finish with embalming Jesus' body. Instead, they found the tomb open and empty, and "a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe." He spoke the words with which I began this sermon:

"Do not be amazed; 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, as he told you." Not only later in Galilee but immediately in Jerusalem did Jesus appear, first of all to one of those women, Mary Magdalene; then to Peter and to the twelve apostles; at other times to large numbers of the disciples. We have their testimony, and they gave their lives to the truth of what they witnessed. They were raised to a courageous, self-giving, new life which was itself evidence of Jesus' Resurrection.

What happened that first Easter created the Christian Church and thereby changed human history. But you know all that.

Why are you here? New York is a wonderful city with a great zest for a good dramatic show. Good liturgy, which we try very hard to do at Saint Thomas Church (being New Yorkers), is often good theater, properly so. But there is much more here than a powerful demonstration of religion.

The Resurrection of Jesus is an historical event, and the Church, which was created by Jesus' Resurrection, gives public expression to it through liturgy and religion, yes. But the Resurrection of Jesus is *a reality, a direct, personal gift from God*, which we who believe in Jesus Christ carry about within us and among us as we go through life.

When we receive this gift, when we begin to take it into our minds and hearts, in the words of the Apostle, "our life lies hid with Christ in God." That Kingdom of God, about which Jesus taught and for which he lived and died, is a whole new world into which we ourselves can step. It is a wonderful place which changes the way we look at everything, especially the way we regard our sorrows, losses, sins and even death – because of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christians are baptized into, that is, united with, Jesus' death and resurrection. That means that just as Jesus died and rose again, we who are baptized die to sin and rise to newness of life. We learn not to set our minds and hearts on earthly things, the things that pass away; but instead we are set on better, lasting, higher things, where Christ is, where he has risen and reigns with God in his Kingdom. That is why the Church is called the Body of Christ. Because Christ has risen and reigns at God's right hand, so are we risen with him as members of his Body on earth even as we look forward to the perfection of life with him in heaven.

I want to take this opportunity to invite you to enjoy the life of God's Kingdom by taking your part in the Body of Christ. If you are a baptized Christian, then it's time you realized what that means! If you are not baptized but want to be, Hallelujah. Talk to one of the clergy about it; nothing would please us more than to arrange it. This takes us back to the beginning of this sermon; the feast is for everyone who desires it.

This very morning we will witness one of the signs that Christ is risen. The sacramental bread and wine of the Eucharist become the Body and Blood of Christ because God raised Jesus from the dead and because Jesus is who he said he is – the Christ, the Son of the living God. Let us now taste and see how gracious the Lord is. He has given us the gift that will see us all the way through life and the gate of death into his eternal and glorious Kingdom.

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.