Dead: Alive in Christ Memory Verse: Matthew 28:8

April 9th, 2023 Scripture Reading: Matthew 28:1-7

**SLIDE 1: Title**

**SLIDE 2: Christ is risen! (He is risen indeed) Hallelujah!**

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 This Lenten season has been a bit of a slough hasn’t it. We’ve journeyed through the reality of our sin, admitted to the fact that we are guilty before God. I mean, who wants to do something like that? We want to avoid being in trouble and yet we cannot deny that we are steeped in it. We have faced some tough truths and have opened ourselves up to some of the blows that God’s word means to land on us. The Bible is not a safe book! It means to bring about the destruction of sin in our lives. It means to put to death our selfish desires. But oh what a payoff we get to enjoy. Victory! New Life! Relationship with God. Today we celebrate our movement from people who were dead in sin, to people who became dead to sin and alive in Christ! Every step of the struggle is worth it when we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ who has perfected, that is, completed, our faith.

 Easter is the greatest of all holy days because it represents the ultimate victory of Jesus, which, in turn, becomes our victory. But I think so often, we don’t necessarily live as victors. I’m not saying we live as losers, always moping around, but if you think about a great victory, a hard fought battle, a well-deserved win, I mean it’s the stuff movies are of. We love an underdog story, we love to see the good win out over evil. We love the drama! One of the greatest genres that best captures this are classic sports movies. Here is an example of what I am talking about from hocky team that goes by the name the “Mighty Ducks”. CLIP

**SLIDE 3: Clip**

Now really with any of these sports movies, you can tell right from the opening scene how the movie will end. We already know the final outcome and yet, we will sit for two hours to see the story play out. We will experience the ups and downs of the main characters, we will be witness to their struggles, we will take note of how the odds are stacked against them. We wince when they are in pain and we sigh with relief when things go well for them. Then, the big tournament finally arrives. Again, we know how it ends, but we still want to watch the close calls and the missed shots. We want our main characters to face opposition…if it’s too easy the story is not exciting, the victory is empty. And as tension mounts and the clock ticks down we wonder how in the world they are going to pull it off, but sure enough, just as we had known all along, they scrape out a victory. And then the music score ramps up and everyone is shouting, and hugging and confetti is flying and we as viewers feel the tingle of goosebumps and maybe even a catch in our throats. These stories have an emotional dimension to them. We realize that we have just seen something that is beautiful, something that is intrinsically good. And it’s not about the sport…the movie could be about soccer or football or tennis or hocky or chess or anything, what we respond to as humans is the struggle, the struggle that it takes to achieve victory. Without the struggle, the victory holds no power, it’s empty. So, we rejoice with the winners, we cheer them on, but how often do we realize the story is not a Hollywood production. We are those who struggled hard, we are those who were up against an overpowered foe, we are those who gritted our teeth and kept our eyes on the prize…In our struggle against sin, we are those who have won! We are the victors! We celebrate, we cheer, we are on top of the world, or maybe we are not…Do we live as victors? It’s easy for us to live vicariously through characters on the screen, and maybe we do the same with those ones we read about in Scripture as well.

**SLIDE 4: “Don’t be afraid. He isn’t here because he has been raised from the dead, just as he said would happen by the way**.”

 We have already read the account of the resurrection found in Matthew 28, and as we read, we can identify these characters. We can understand some of the sadness of the two Mary’s as they approach the tomb that day. The epic moment of victory and celebration had not come. It was just another win chalked up by the Romans. Another puck that missed the net. But then we read about the angel breaking into their world of sadness in order to tell them the good news. We hear the musical score start to rise as the guards faint from terror and the angel perches himself on top of the giant stone door. The women, expecting to find a wrapped body, instead find nothing…It really is a bit anti-climactic. The dramatic music fades. And confusion sets in. This has been a nonsensical plot twist. Something here does not compute. Dead people stay dead. The angel explains, “Don’t be afraid. He isn’t here because he has been raised from the dead, just as he said would happen by the way.” These women, as well as the disciples, and anyone else who followed after Jesus knew the end of the story. And they knew it because they were told how it all turns out and yet, like a modern audience in the movie theatre, they were astounded by the ending. Matthew tells us that they left that scene with great fear and excitement.

 My question is, as readers, as viewers so to speak, of this Easter story, do we respond in the same way? Do we know and understand this fear and excitement for ourselves? Do we throw up our hands, put a smile on our face and shout out in the joy of Easter’s victory? We as modern believers know better than anyone how the story goes. We have seen it play out a thousand times. We have four original versions of the story and countless picture books and movies that help us reimagine it all. We get it. We know what happens. Jesus rises from the dead. We celebrate with the disciples as they meet with him, we smile at the idea that there has been a happy ending, but what we have a harder time getting the story off of the page, off of the screen and into our hearts. Do we live as victors?

**SLIDE 5: Do we live as victors?**

 Peter was the hot-headed disciple who tended to act before he thought everything through. He initially followed Jesus at the drop of a net. He was bold and willing to try anything, including walking on water. He was there when Jesus was transfigured. He met Moses and Elijah. He was named the Rock by Jesus, who also referred to him as Satan. He cut off a servant’s ear when Jesus was being arrested. He wept after denying that he ever knew Jesus. But despite his failings, Peter went on to become the leader of the church. God spoke through him at Pentecost, God used him to radically change the way Jewish Christians viewed non-Jewish people. Peter oversaw the explosive growth of Christianity and he dealt with his share of disagreement s and arguments as well. Peter also went on to write a few letters of his own known as 1 and 2 Peter. And in 1 Peter, he addresses a non-Jewish audience of believers. He encourages them to find their identity in Christ. Peter makes it clear that this world is not our home and, as Christians, we are essentially strangers in a strange land. We are a bit of an underdog you might say. In the section that we are going to read, Peter sounds a bit like a coach in the locker room at halftime. So if you can imagine a whistle around his neck, I think Peter helps us take this Easter story off of the printed page and imprint it upon our hearts. He is going to show us how we can live like the victors we are.

**SLIDE 7: 1 Peter 1:13, “Therefore, once you have your minds ready for action and you are thinking clearly, place your hope completely on the grace that will be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed.”**

We begin in 1 Peter 1:13, “Therefore, once you have your minds ready for action and you are thinking clearly, place your hope completely on the grace that will be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed.” That, by the way, refers to Jesus’ second coming. Peter says hope in God’s grace, completely! This is an all Easter-eggs-in-one-basket scenario. And I love how Peter adds that those who hope in grace are thinking clearly. This is not a long-shot gamble. This is not a question of a blind leap into the unknown. We know the end of the movie! We know how it all turns out! Take in all the facts, think through the data clearly and once you have your head on straight, place your hope on God’s grace.

**SLIDE 8: READ 14-17“As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.” Since you call on a Father who judges each person’s work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.”**

 In this section, it is apparent that Peter has Gentile believers in mind, or we could say, those who are new to the faith. I know for many of you, myself included, we were born and raised in Christian homes. Our parents are believers and likely our Grandparents are as well. This legacy of faith is a wonderful provision, and it is something I have come to greatly appreciate in my life, but I have struggled with the notion of not having a very powerful testimony. I grew up attending youth conferences and things in which the speaker would share about their faith and how God changed their life, but in order to share their story, they had to tell about what Peter calls “their former desires that shaped them when they were ignorant.” I don’t think I have ever been ignorant of Jesus in my life and so it is hard for me to know the darkness of life without him. It’s hard for me to separate my life into a before Jesus section and an after Jesus section. But the call to both lifelong believers and new converts is the same: “as obedient children, you must be holy in every aspect of your lives.” Peter even pulls up a verse from Leviticus to make his point. Holiness is nothing new. It’s always been part of the story. Sinlessness has always been the goal and it still is to this very day. Peter reminds us, we are all strangers, underdogs, dwelling in a strange land.

**SLIDE 9: 1 Peter 1: 18-19 “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”**

 READ 18 -19 Peter explains the means of our liberation. It’s not found in wealth…that path is emptiness, but we find liberation in the precious blood of Christ. Peter calls Jesus a flawless, spotless lamb, which is a reference to the Jewish Passover in which a lamb would be killed and its blood smeared on the door frames of someone’s home. The blood then deterred the angel of death from visiting that particular home. This is a very strange act. It is a biazzare thing to do. And it needed to be done but because it make perfect sense to do it in those moments, but rather out of obedience to God. By obeying, God’s people were liberated from bondage in Egypt. All these underdogs had to do was obey and watch God work.

 We can see Peter weaving in the long history of God’s people in this message to his Gentile readers. His reference to Leviticus and allusions to the Passover help fill in a faith background that for many of his readers would be completely blank. Peter is grafting them into the story that God has been telling all along. Peter is assuring his audience by saying, “Hey, you are a part of this too…you are included…this is your story.”

**SLIDE 10: 1 Peter 1: 20 “Christ was chosen before the creation of the world, but was only revealed at the end of time. This was done for you.”**

 Peter goes on in verse 20, “Christ was chosen before the creation of the world, but was only revealed at the end of time. This was done for you.” All of this history, all the up and downs, all the rooting for the underdog, all the trials and tribulations, it was all done for you. Jesus, the Good Shepherd who become the spotless Lamb, who suffered under Pontius Pilate who was crucified, died and buried, who descended into hell…all of it was done for you and me and anyone else “who through Christ are faithful to the God who raised him from the dead and gave him glory.” Christ is risen! (He is risen indeed!) Amen! Because Jesus Christ has been raised, I am able to live faithfully to God. Because Jesus Christ has been raised, I am able to live as one who is dead to sin. Because Jesus Christ has been raised, I am able to, as verse 21 says, rest my faith and hope in God.

People have faith in a lot of things. We trust that the banks won’t go under, we trust that our paycheck will be secure, we trust that our government officials have our best interest in mind, we trust that the food we eat is free of toxins, that our home will remain a safe place and that we will wake up in the morning. We trust that tomorrow will be similar to today…but none if these things are a guarantee. None of these hopes have a sure foundation. Peter plainly says, your faith and hope should rest in God, because only in God do we find the victory.

**SLIDE 11: only in God do we find the victory**

 The fact that we love these sports movies, that we respond to those types of stories should not come as a surprise. They are only faint shadows and reiterations of the Story of stories, the one in which God Almighty creates a good world but it becomes tarnished a broken by the sin of mankind. This alienation from God sets the stage for God’s protagonist, the people of Israel. They enter the scene to show the whole world how good it is to worship and love the one true God. They were going to point out to the world the way to go. But they couldn’t live up to the role and we find that they were only the stand-ins for the one true hero of the story, Jesus Christ, Son of God, born to a virgin in a manger. He lived to die at the hands of his very own people. He lived to die at the hands of you and me. We are more than witness this story. We see parts of it woven into the fabric of every other story to follow. We see the plot changes, the main characters, and I hope we see ourselves. This is not just a story, it is THE story, my story and your story. It is also the story for that cranky co-worker or that nosey neighbor. It is the story for the inmate and the government official. It is the only story in which we can place our faith and hope. We know the end…the Son of God is buried in a tomb for three days, after which he rose and receives all glory. When all odds were against him, Jesus snatched the victory! He did it for you and for me! So…how do we live into this victory?

Put faith and hope in the Story of God’s grace. That’s all we’ve got. It’s the only thing we can count on.

Live as one dead to sin, as one who is holy before the Lord.

Let your life resound with cheering. If they can do it in those sports movies, we can do it in real life. If we can cheer for our favorite athlete, we can cheer for our risen Savoir. Tell your face that we have won. Tell your heart that we have won and then, like the women at the tomb on that glorious day, tell others that, through Jesus, we have won!

**SLIDE 12: He is risen! (He is risen indeed.) Hallelujah!**