

The Risen Holy One
Psalm 16

The Lord is risen. No matter how hard that may be for us to believe, Jesus' body was raised from the dead. He walked out of that tomb on the third day. The Lord is risen indeed!

But let's face it – life's not always pastel suits and family reunions and egg hunts on crisp spring mornings. There are a lot of tough times too – bad diagnoses and broken relationships and funerals and cutting up trees just to get out of your driveway. How can we retain the joy of Easter when God's love is not so easy to see? How can the reality of Easter make a difference in our lives each and every day?

Well, David was no stranger to hard times. He knew what it was like to have his whole world rocked on its foundations. He knew the highest highs – as the hero who killed Goliath, the successful general who led his people into combat against the Philistines, the God-inspired writer of psalms the Church still sings today. And He knew the greatest suffering. He spent years running from his father-in-law, and then later from his own son, both of whom were trying to kill him. And after his great sin with Bathsheba, he knew the oppressive weight of guilt and the terrible consequences that flow out of impulsive, selfish decisions.

And yet, in today's passage, David could bless the Lord. In the midst of his problems he could rejoice. And David's hope, his trust in God flowed out of many of the same truths we have learned from the empty tomb.

For what does Jesus' resurrection tell us about Him? For one thing, it demonstrates the absolute reliability of His Word. In last week's passage from Luke 24, we read how the angels reminded the women who came to the empty tomb that Jesus had predicted everything that would happen to Him: "The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." That's what He said, even before His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. And so great is His knowledge and wisdom, that's exactly what happened.

But Jesus wasn't the only one who predicted His sufferings, and that He would rise from the dead. No, when the apostles began to spread the good news of Jesus' Resurrection, they pointed to today's passage, a psalm written by David some 1000 years before any of them were born. For even though David didn't live to see the cross or the empty tomb, he still wrote the words of verse 10: "You will not leave my soul in Sheol, the place of the dead. Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption."

When Peter preached on this passage at Pentecost, he explained that David wasn't talking about himself, because he did in fact die and was buried in a tomb that was still existing at that time. Instead, David was prophesying about his much greater Son, predicting that Jesus would not remain in the tomb, but would rise again, a fact of which Peter and the rest of the apostles were eyewitnesses.

In making such a prediction, David's psalm thus reinforces the fact that God's Word is completely reliable, that everything it says is true. David himself took comfort in this fact in verse 7, as he blessed the Lord for His counsel. And we can enjoy the same blessing today. No matter how many competing truth claims may swarm around us, no matter how confusing all the events of life may seem to be, no matter how difficult the choices that lay before us, we have a firm foundation in the Word of God, the God Who knows and understands everything that happens. And because Jesus walked out of that tomb on the third day, just as He said He would, we have the greatest proof of all that everything the prophets said about Him, and everything He said about Himself is true. So, why shouldn't we base our lives, all our thoughts, all our decisions, all our actions on such unshakable truth?

And of course one of the things that Jesus said about Himself is that He is the Son of God, One with the Father. And again, His cross and resurrection prove this as well. For think about it. If Jesus was just a man, He couldn't have walked out of that tomb. No, a dead man like Lazarus had to have someone come to his tomb and roll the stone away and be called out of death into life. But no one did any of that for Jesus. Instead, as He clearly said in John 10:18, "No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father." It is easy to see that only the Son of God had the power to rise from the dead as Jesus did.

But at the same time, His death points to how we should respond to this undeniable truth. For if Jesus really was the Son of God who died on the cross, His sacrifice has to be necessary for the salvation of all mankind – for if there were any other way anyone could be saved, why would God have made His Son go through something so horrible? No, given the cross and the empty tomb, Jesus has to be Who He says He is: the Son of God, the only Way, the only Truth, and the only Life, the only One worthy of all our worship and praise, all our obedience and devotion.

And David understood that as well, as we see in verses 3 and 4. He knew all too well that in his time there were lots of other gods competing for people's attention and devotion. People worshipped pagan fertility gods like Baal and Asherah because they were interested in sex, power, and prosperity – come to think of it, things haven't changed that much, have they? But David observed that the only thing anyone gets from worshipping any of these worldly things is sorrow – the inevitable disappointment of trusting in things that are fleeting, of looking to things and people that can't keep their promises.

And so instead of going down that dead-end street, David learned in verse 2 the same lesson the empty tomb teaches us – that there is no goodness in life apart from the One True God. That's why he made the commitment we read in verse 8 – instead of worshipping false gods, David set only the Lord before him, following God all the time, letting nothing come between him and God. And that's why in verse 5 David could renounce everything else in the world in which he might have been tempted to place his trust and look to God alone as his portion, his inheritance. Even though he lived 1000 years before Jesus' Resurrection, David knew what the empty tomb proves to us: there is only one true God, and He is worthy of all our adoration and devotion.

But if the empty tomb proves we can trust Jesus, and if it proves that we should worship and serve Jesus alone, it also reminds us of the great blessings we receive from being in a right relationship with Him. Among other things, the empty tomb proves that God will protect us and deliver us, no matter what we might be going through.

That's exactly what David cried out for in verse 1 – Preserve me, O God! But because he put his trust in God, because he took refuge in God, because as he says in verse 8 he set the Lord before Him, seeking to follow Him, he was confident that God was at his right hand. Now, to an ancient soldier, this was the greatest comfort of all, for although he could protect his own left side with his shield, his right side, the side on which he wielded his sword was vulnerable to attack. But if God was standing on his right side, his unshielded side, well he had nothing to fear, even in the fiercest battles.

No, it's no wonder that David says in verse 8 that, no matter what might happen to him, he would not be moved. With God on his side, there's no way he could ever be shaken.

And that's the same lesson we can learn from the empty tomb, isn't it? For think about all our most fearsome problems – injury, sickness, poverty, famine, war. All of them, in one way or another, lead to death – that's why we are so afraid of them. Death is everyone's worst enemy. But when Jesus

walked out of that tomb, He not only overcame death on His own behalf. No, as Paul says in our responsive reading from I Corinthians 15, Christ was only the firstfruits of those that sleep. His resurrection guarantees that all those who trust in Him will one day do exactly what He did. No matter what may happen to us in this life, one day we will all rise from our own graves, sharing in the victory Christ has won not only over sin, but over death itself.

And straining forward into his own future, David could see the same thing. For look at how he ends this psalm, looking now to God's right hand. This is no longer the image of battle, where soldiers stand side to side. No, this is an image of a king at peace, seated on His throne. And the position of greatest honor at court was on the King's right hand. Only those enjoying the highest favor were allowed to be so close, sharing in the greatest bounty and blessing of the King's presence. That's what David was looking forward to.

And what did David say was the natural outcome of being so close to the King? Fulness of joy – and that's the same joy to which all who trust in Christ can look forward as well. For no matter what happened to Jesus in this life, He walked out of that tomb victorious. Because of His Resurrection, He has ascended into Heaven, to share in the glory and joy of God the Father. And no matter what may happen to any of us in this life, He has promised to share that glory and joy with all who trust in Him, with all who share in His Resurrection power. Like David, we can be confident in the pleasure of being in the presence of God forever.

But also like David, we don't have to wait for Jesus to come back to experience the joy of the empty tomb. For look at verse 9 – here David doesn't say that his heart will be glad sometime later. He doesn't say that his glory will rejoice some time in the future, when he dies and goes to be with God. No, because he is so certain of God's eternal blessings, his heart is glad in this life. His glory rejoices today, even in the midst of all the problems that life might bring his way.

And in the light of the empty tomb, how much more should we rejoice today? Knowing what great a price the Father and the Son paid to save us from our sins, how much more glad should our hearts be today? For no matter how confusing life may be, we have an unerring guide and standard of truth in the Word of God. No matter what threats may face us, Christ our King has already gained victory over them. So, doesn't it make sense for us to turn away from anything else in which we might be tempted to place our trust?

For Jesus Christ is our risen Lord, the Holy One, the only Son of God, the One who died so that we might be forgiven, the One Who rose that we might have newness of life today and eternal life with Him forever, the One Who rules and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Shouldn't we give all our love, all our loyalty, and all our praise to Him?