

Easter Sunday Angel Eyes

Text: Mark 16:1–8

Other Lessons: Psalm 118:15–29 ; Job 19:23–27; 1 Corinthians 15:51–57

Sermon Goal: That hearers may rejoice in the message of the Easter angel that Christ is risen and that they would embrace the message of the Gospel faithfully written and proclaimed by God’s messengers, above all, His apostles and evangelists, but also His preachers.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Every Sunday is a “little Easter,” but the festival of the Resurrection of Our Lord is the high point of the Church Year. Not surprisingly, the Readings for this day are wonderfully oriented toward the proclamation of Christ’s resurrection—and ours. “This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it” (Psalm 118:24). Job 19 confesses the glorious truth that our Redeemer lives, and that we will see Him with our own eyes, even after worms have destroyed our mortal remains. First Corinthians 15:51–57 is the climax of the great “resurrection chapter,” celebrating the defeat of sin, death, and the Law and the victory we have been given through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Like the women in Mark 16:6–8, we have heard the message that “Christ is risen!” and have believed it, but we long to see Jesus face-to-face, and our faith is assaulted by His apparent absence. We know where to find Him—in His Word and Sacraments—but when we are frightened by death and eternal judgment, our sinful flesh doubts the promises that He is risen and on our side. In such times of fear and doubting, our lips are reluctant to proclaim the Good News to others. But the Gospel comes to the rescue! Jesus confirms that “we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7) by calling “blessed” those who believe in Him on the basis of the Word of God, without seeing Him (John 20:29).

Sermon Outline

Sermon Theme: The angel in the tomb knows the whole story of Jesus’ resurrection, and when he sees the women, he proclaims the Gospel to them, shows them where Jesus’ body had formerly lain, and tells them that they can see Jesus themselves in Galilee. Likewise, the “angels” or messengers of the Church in the apostolic ministry tell God’s people where they can find Jesus and His salvation in the Means of Grace.

- I. What did the Easter angel’s eyes see and testify to?
- II. What did the apostles’ “angel eyes” testify to?
- III. What do pastors’ “angel eyes” testify to?

Sermon

I. The phrase “angel eyes” will conjure up different thoughts based on your age and interests. Older music lovers will think of the 1946 jazz standard popularized by Ella Fitzgerald and Frank Sinatra. My generation will think of the power ballad of the same name released by The Jeff Healey Band in 1988. Listeners to modern country radio will think of the 2012 song “Angel Eyes” by the band Love and Theft. And dog lovers will recognize “Angels Eyes” as the brand name for products that help clear up tear stains around the eyes of dogs.

But for now, push all those other kinds of angel eyes out of your mind, since today you and I should focus on only one set of angel eyes, and through those eyes see the greatest sight this world has ever seen. I’m talking about the eyes of the Easter angel in the empty tomb of Jesus.

It's funny that we call it the "empty tomb," since St. Mark's account depicts the tomb being a bit overcrowded on the first Easter Sunday. The two Marys and Salome were shocked to discover the large stone rolled away from the tomb, and they went inside to investigate. They were startled to find not a dead Jesus inside but a young man dressed in white, an angel of the Lord. Their alarm was most likely twofold: first, they were distressed that no Jesus was to be found, and second, angels of the Lord are scary! Despite what you see in figurines and artistic depictions, God's angels usually appear as majestic creatures who strike fear into the hearts of onlookers. That's why the first words out of the mouths of angels are often "Don't be afraid!"

On Easter morning, this is exactly what happens. The angel says to the terrified women, "Do not be alarmed" (Mark 16:6). They don't need to fear this angel, since he has come in peace to be the bearer of Good News. The word we translate as "angel" means "messenger," so bringing the Gospel is His main job! He announces that they don't need to fear what happened to the body of Jesus, because He is risen indeed! Alleluia! The angel continues, "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, just as He told you" (vv. 6-7).

The angel directs the women to see with their own eyes that Jesus isn't there, and then he explains what his own eyes have witnessed. He knows they are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, "who was crucified." Another way of translating this is "the Crucified One," which is very significant. The women had gazed upon Jesus suffering for the sin of the whole world under His Father's wrath on the cross, and they had looked on as Joseph of Arimathea buried Jesus, but that's all they had seen. The angel, however, has seen the resurrected Jesus with his own eyes but still calls Him "the Crucified One."

II

Later that afternoon, Jesus would appear to ten of His apostles and prove His identity by showing them the nail and spear scars on His hands and side. The next Sunday, Jesus invites doubting Thomas to touch those scars, which turns him into believing Thomas as he cries out to the Crucified One, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). Still later, St. Paul would encounter the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus and then write to the Corinthians, "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). Paul characterized his preaching to the Galatians this way: "It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified" (Galatians 3:1b).

You might be thinking, this is Easter, why are we still so focused on the crucifixion? Because the cross must always be the center of our theology, the focal point of life. A God who has not been crucified on your behalf would do you no good. Look through the angel's eyes and see that Jesus is the Crucified One, put to death for your sins. The cross is our life! St. Paul wrote, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20); and "far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (6:14).

Of course, the resurrection is essential too. You also need to see through the angel's eyes that Jesus was raised on Easter for your justification. Good Friday and Easter are like two sides of the same coin. You can't buy anything with a one-sided quarter. Jesus couldn't pay for your salvation only by dying or only by living but by both. He had to actively obey God's Law on your behalf and passively suffer for your sins against the Law. He had to actively fight Satan, whom you couldn't defeat, and die for all the times you have fallen for the devil's temptations. He had to go into the grave and deposit all of your sins there, but He had to come out alive in order to grant you forgiveness of sins and His own righteousness.

And after His resurrection, Jesus continues the pattern established on the first Easter by hiding Himself from the sight of His disciples and by using angels to proclaim His death and resurrection. Though you are like the women at the tomb and cannot see Jesus with your own eyes, the reliable testimony of the Easter angel recorded in Scripture is precious Gospel that you should keep before your eyes at all times. Though Jesus remains hidden from our physical sight, He has continued to send us angels ever since His resurrection to testify to His presence among us. No, I'm not talking about angels from heaven, but earthly angels who proclaim the Gospel. Remember, angel simply means "messenger." In the Bible, "angel" doesn't necessarily imply a heavenly being. The very human and mortal John the Baptist, for example, is called God's "angel," or messenger.

After His resurrection, Jesus sent His apostles out to be His angels, His messengers, to preach the Gospel to the whole creation. And those angel apostles appointed everywhere they went pastors and teachers to continue sharing the Good News of Good Friday and Easter. Just as the heavenly angel Gabriel visited Mary with the wonderful news that the Lord was with her in the incarnation, now earthly angels or messengers proclaim to all who believe and are baptized that the Lord Jesus is with them until the end of the age. Just as the angel of the Lord brought glad tidings of great joy for all people to the shepherds at Christmas, now earthly angels proclaim the glad tidings of great joy that Christ has died for all, for the sin of the whole world, and has risen to declare all humans righteous so that they may be saved by believing this message.

III

There was nothing particularly angelic about Christ's apostles then or about Christian pastors today. We are a pretty sorry lot, really. Nobody would look at me and say, "He's got angel eyes." But what apostles and pastors of Christ do have are beautiful feet. Not literally, but according to the prophet Isaiah and the apostle St. Paul, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" (Romans 10:15). In other words, the footsteps of angels who preach the Gospel to us are beautiful because they proclaim the beautiful message of Christ, and Paul continues, "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17).

Today receive this word of Christ through the messenger He has called to preach to you at [Saving Grace Lutheran Church Chino Valley, AZ]: for the sake of Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven. Baptized into His death and resurrection, you are now clothed with His righteousness, which grants eternal salvation. And recognize that Jesus is in the Lord's Supper to feed His followers with His true body given and true blood shed for the forgiveness of sins, under bread and wine. We don't see Jesus with us, but through His angel messengers He announces that He has promised to be here, so we see Him through the eyes of faith. After Communion, we will sing, "Lord, now You let your servant go in peace. . . . My own eyes have seen the salvation." But before that, we look under the bread and wine and worship Christ through angel eyes, as we gather "with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven" around Christ's glorious throne.

On Easter, the angel told the women where they could find Jesus; likewise, today I have the same message: Jesus has promised that you may find Him in His Word and Sacraments. May your eyes stay always stay fixed on Jesus Christ, crucified for your sin and raised for your salvation. Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.