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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
March 27, 2016  
Easter Sunday

Scriptures: Ps. 118, Job 19:23-27, 1 Cor.15:12-23 Mat.  
28:1-8

Hymns: 191; 200; 198; 205; 201; 207:2,6

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and  
our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren,  
concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow  
as others who have no hope. <sup>14</sup>For if we believe that  
Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with  
Him those who sleep in Jesus (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is  
truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, Our Crucified and Risen Savior, dear  
fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Object Lessons of His Passion --

During the past several weeks we have based our  
midweek Lenten meditations on some of the objects we

found around Christ or those who were close to Him during His passion. Some were objects which Jesus used to reveal His grace and humility. Others were objects that were taken hold of by Jesus' enemies to use against Him. However even then what we found in these objects was the grace of a loving Savior who came to bring us life and salvation.

This Easter morning we are going to pick up on two more of the objects that surrounded Jesus' death, and this time also His burial:

**THEME:** The Seal and the Stone: A Lesson in Resurrection Hope.

### **I. The Appearance of the Grave's Finality.**

We read on Good Friday about the concern of the chief priests that someone might come and steal Jesus' body and make the claim the Jesus had risen from the dead. They remembered what Jesus had said about rising again, even though the disciples had forgotten. A huge stone had been used to seal the sepulchre where Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had laid Jesus' body. The stone rolled over the opening to the tomb was in itself a symbol of finality. Jesus was dead and buried. He was really gone. Death had taken Him.

If there is one lesson that the world thinks should be understood from history is that people die, and that is the end of the matter. People don't come back from the grave. It is understood that death is final.

However, the grave with its large stone wasn't enough for the Chief Priests. They came to Pilate and requested

that Pilate put his official seal on the edge of the stone, making it a crime against Rome for anyone to open the tomb. They also asked that a guard be set until the third day passed to assure that no one would be able to smuggle Jesus' body out of the tomb. So the seal was placed on the stone and the guard was set in place, and no one would dare to interfere with such a guard posted outside the tomb. It would be far too dangerous. With that the Chief Priests were satisfied that Jesus wasn't going anywhere; He would stay in that tomb. According to their thinking, that was where He belonged.

And so that is the way things are, right? We bury our dead. They belong in the grave. They stay in the grave. There is a finality to the grave that can't be undone. Then why did the Apostle Paul write what he did in our text?

**1 Thessalonians 4:13** But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.

A couple of words jump out of these verses. "Ignorant." Paul didn't want Christians to be ignorant, uninformed of what the truth really is about those who have "fallen asleep." Isn't that expression "fallen asleep" just a euphemism for those who are squeamish about the reality of death? No, that is the very expression Jesus used when He spoke of Jairus' daughter. Jesus said she was sleeping; everyone laughed at Jesus because they thought **He** was ignorant, while in fact they were the ones who were ignorant of the truth of the resurrection.

The world has no hope. For the world death and the grave is the most final thing there is. And so they grieve, without hope. But we are told that those who die with

faith in Christ are but sleeping. We have a real hope of a reunion with our loved ones. We have a real hope for life because we know a greater certainty than the Chief Priests, who as Sadducees thought this life was all there was; once dead, you are gone forever. Now, that is the epitome of ignorance, and the absolute absence of hope.

We have **hope** because we know --

## **II. The Certainty of Jesus' Resurrection.**

Paul continued with this assertion “**For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again**” (v.14). Well, do we believe that Jesus both died and rose again? We have pretty much covered the part about the certainty of Jesus' death both in our Good Friday service, and already in this sermon. Yes, Jesus died, but that part about Jesus rising again? Can we be so sure that Jesus really rose again?

Do we really believe that, or is that merely a figure of speech? Is that really only talking about His teaching living on after Him? Or is it that He lives in our memory? Or is it that we carry on in His tradition of doing good to others and so Jesus lives through us? That is what is taught by the world. That is what is taught even in some Christian churches today. They preach a mix of choices about how wonderful Jesus was while He lived and how we celebrate His life on Easter morning. If one isn't careful, and I mean **very** careful, one might be deceived because these ideas appear to agree with the reality we experience in life.

And this is nothing new. The devil has been attempting to undermine any certainty about Jesus' resurrection from that very first Resurrection morning. The Chief Priests were quick to bribe the Roman guards who saw the angel

and the empty tomb. Yes, they were bribed to spread the story that they had fallen asleep on the job, and when they awoke the body had been stolen.

It was also a problem that arose among the Corinthian Christians where some taught, and deceived others, that there was no resurrection of the dead. In response in his first epistle to the Corinthian congregation Paul listed the eyewitnesses to the fact of Jesus' resurrection. There was no room for doubt left at all. He was seen on many occasions by many people, including five hundred disciples at one time. So are we convinced?

It is the Holy Spirit alone that has done the convincing. The Spirit has opened our hearts to believe so that we know that Jesus “**was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification**”

(Romans 4:25).

This faith brings us a great blessings from God, that is --  
**III. The Certain Hope of our Resurrection.**

Let us review again what Paul wrote in our text:

**1 Thessalonians 4:14** “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, **even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.**”

Paul speaks in no uncertain terms. This is going to happen. It is going to happen because it has already happened with Jesus. Christ was the first-fruits. This doesn't only mean that Jesus was first, but that He was the best. Jesus' resurrection held the promise of more to come. Jesus' resurrection demonstrates that resurrection is real. Jesus resurrection is the power for our

resurrections. On the last day Jesus will call the all dead from their graves, some to the resurrection of eternal life, and some to the resurrection to eternal condemnation and death in hell. We know that we shall be included in that resurrection to eternal life in heaven because we know that Jesus has cleansed us of all our sin (1 John 1:9), and there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).

If we know this than why do we use the word hope? It is not because there is any uncertainty to this outcome of resurrection to life. It is because we still wait for it, and while we wait for that which we know shall come to pass, we watch for it in the sure and certain hope that this is what Jesus has prepared for us. He has gone before us to prepare a place for us. He went to the cross and the grave, and He rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven, and He shall come again to receive us to Himself so that where He is there we may be also (John 14:2, 3).

Hallelujah! Amen! So it shall be, for Christ is Risen, He Is Risen Indeed!

“Jesus Lives! The vict’ry’s won !  
Death no longer can appall me;  
Jesus lives! Death’s reign is done!  
From the grave Christ will recall me.  
Brighter scenes will then commence;  
This shall be my confidence.” (The Lutheran Hymnal 201:1)

**AMEN.**

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans15:13)