

Dear Christians, who have come to hear about the Resurrection,

Mike Ellis is a reporter for a small South Carolina newspaper, the *Anderson Independent Mail*. He writes the following, on March 30,

“Easter falls on April Fools' Day this year, the first time since 1956, and the joke writes itself.”

“There's a million ways to tell the wisecrack — considered by some historians to be the greatest prank in history — but the root of it goes like this: Jesus died and was resurrected three days later, the ultimate prank on the devil, said Cal Samra, editor and publisher of *The Joyful Noiseletter*, a magazine devoted to religious jokes and joys.”

This Easter Sunday we are going to again hear the Good News. The testimony comes from our Holy God. He proclaims to us through his angel messenger, **“He Has Risen!”** Because we are celebrating Easter on April Fool's day we add, **“No Fooling!”** Jesus has risen and it is no joke. If there is a prank or joke, it is on Satan and Jesus' enemies. This good news calms our fears and strengthens our faith.

1. Don't be alarmed. Come see Jesus' empty tomb.

One thing 21st Century Christians don't worry about, is Jesus dying. The 1st Century disciples not only worried about it, but they had to deal with it. We, however, have our own fears and challenges. Our own death is one of them. To every Christian who is afraid and alarmed, the Lord issues an invitation. Come and see Jesus' empty tomb.

A. Several women are mentioned in St. Mark's report. These courageous women proceeded to the cemetery despite challenges to their faith and service to Jesus.

1. These women were dedicated believers in Jesus.

One Mary was the mother of the apostle known as James the Less. Salome was the mother of apostles James and John. Mary Magdalene is confused with other women in the Gospels. All we really know is that she supported Jesus' group and she was loyal to him at the end of his life.

We know little about these women. What we do know is that they had hoped Jesus was the Messiah, now they filled with sadness and fear. Nevertheless, they were determined and dedicated to see that he received a proper

burial. So, they traveled to Jesus' tomb very early Sunday morning.

2. We also know these women were facing serious challenges. They wanted to serve Jesus, but *who would roll away the grave stone?* Normally, it would take three strong men.

A more important question was, "*How would they be saved?*" They understood that they were sinners and they could not enter God's holy heaven without the forgiveness of sins. John, the Baptist, and Jesus had made this clear in their preaching. Now Jesus was dead. It didn't seem that he could help.

3. Today you have come to church to worship God. One of the things brings us to church is our fears and challenges. We want to serve God. However, loving him and loving our neighbor is challenging. We feel we don't have the strength to move the "rocks" that are blocking our way. Our neighbor's troubles and our own troubles and weaknesses stand in the way.

Perhaps we go looking for Jesus in prayer, seeking his help and he seems to have disappeared. We are afraid when our journey will end in the cemetery, we will be disappointed in ourselves and worse, that God will be disappointed with us.

There is Good News! The women find courage and help at Jesus' tomb.

B. God knew the women were struggling and frustrated. He sends words that will calm their fears and help them.

1. In verse 5 we are told the women went into the tomb and they saw a young man dressed in white. We know from the other gospels that this is an angel from heaven. There was another angel with him, but Mark only mentions the one who speaks. He has a message from God. It is a message of hope.

When we are frustrated and disappointed, we are to go to God's word. He has a message of hope and joy. While I believe that God can have a sense of humor, he is not joking when he talks about Jesus and what Jesus has done for us. The message of salvation from the angel gives all Christians hope.

2. The angel says in verse 6, **"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him."**

The angel does not deny that Jesus had died. However, Jesus was no longer dead. He had risen from the grave. He was alive! They could see the place where his body had been laid. He was no longer confined to the tomb. He had departed.

3. The angel indicates that the women shouldn't be alarmed because Jesus is alive. But there is more. There is special meaning in his resurrection. Jesus is their Savior. Through his sufferings and death Jesus won the forgiveness of sins. His resurrection proves that we are right or justified before God. St. Paul writes in Romans, "**He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.**" (4:25) We never have to be afraid that God will hold our sins against us. We are forgiven. We never have to be afraid that God is gone and he is not listening to our prayers. Through Jesus we have the hope of a resurrection to live eternally with God. Through Jesus we have the assurance that he will help us to give Christian service. Before our date with the cemetery, the Lord will help us be a blessing to others and to make a difference through our Christian service.

2. Don't be afraid. Go and tell about your living Savior.

Over the years Christians at Shepherd of the Valley have served the Lord in a special way at Easter. Members and winter visitors have brought friends and family to our Easter worship. Doing this is in line with our Lord's command through the angel. "**Go & tell!**" We are not to be afraid of going and telling about our living Savior.

A. We learn from the angel that Jesus himself was "on the go."

1. What was he doing? The Scriptures do not give us the details. We know that Jesus was always focused on his mission. Whatever Jesus was doing he was to make sure the message of the resurrection and its blessings would be communicated to the Judeans and to the world.

2. The disciples receive a promise that they will see Jesus. They saw him that same Easter evening. The command to go to Galilee gave them a purpose. They were not to stand around. They were to be "on the go."

In Galilee Jesus would spend time with them. He would teach them and continue their training for the ministry. He would speak again of their mission to share the Good News. Eventually they would go to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and beyond. In the angel's message, we see Jesus' love for his disciples and his plans for them.

B. Jesus says the same thing to you and me. "**Don't be afraid! Go & tell!**"

1. Disciples are afraid. They say, "*I want to tell the good news, but I just don't know what to say. I don't feel confident.*"

It isn't the most comfortable thing to tell someone that they are sinner and

they need a Savior. If we can help a person be aware of their need for Jesus, then sharing the Good News of his sacrifice & resurrection follows naturally.

Some time ago I got a phone call from a man named Ron Denley. He was concerned that his Aunt Jeanne of Sun City West. She was going to die without Jesus. She was close to 90 years old when I met her. She had rejected his attempts to witness to her over the years. He asked me if I would give it a try. I went up to her apartment at the Heritage. I was nervous. Elderly seniors tend to be very shy toward strangers that they have never met. With Ron's name and my Bible, I went to see her. I was honest with her. She didn't have to see me, but her nephew wanted me to visit. I told her I was a Lutheran pastor. She let me stay. When we talked religion she bluntly said that she didn't think God would let her into heaven. She had ignored him by skipping church for close to 70 years. I told her that what she had done wasn't right. However, I said that God forgave her. I asked her if she knew who Jesus was and that he had died on the cross for her sins. She said that she had learned about Jesus in Sunday school as a girl. I told her that Jesus died for her sins too and God forgave her for ignoring him. She liked the news, but struggled to accept he would do that for her. We discussed the matter at virtually every visit I made for the next few years. In time the Holy Spirit moved her heart to be more certain that she was in fact going to heaven. I believe that she grew in that belief until the Lord took her home.

2. There are many Jeanne's in the world. Some are younger, some are older. Some have never heard of Jesus. Some have heard a few things about him. Jesus encourages you and me to prepare by regularly hearing his word and receiving Holy Communion. This prepares us to carry out our purpose.

Then we need to recognize the opportunities that the Lord puts in front of us. Every "Jeanne" in the world knows that they are facing physical death. Some will even understand that they have sinned and must answer to God. We can tell them that they are forgiven. We can tell them more than once. The reason we do so: Jesus lives! All who believe in him are saved!

Conclusion: Easter is no joke. **He has risen! No fooling!** God's messenger reported the facts. The Holy Scriptures proclaim that message today. Christ rose from the dead. He lives. He brings forgiveness and life for all. It is our purpose to **"go and tell."** As Jesus helped his first disciples, so he will help us to "go and tell" that he has risen! Amen.