THE FEAST OF THE RESURRECTION
West Henrietta - 1962

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IN NOMINE JESU

St. Mark 16: 8 (RSV) And they went out and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them; and they said nothing to any one, for they were afraid.

FRIGHTENING REALITY - JESUS LIVES

One of the things which is most often overlooked in the blessed story of the Resurrection as we have it in St. Mark is the fact that the women "went out and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." Many believe that St. Mark closed his Gospel on this note. The overwhelming power of this new thing which had come had made the first witnesses afraid. Being afraid is not a very good feeling. It is like an acid which begins to gnaw away at all the joys of your life. But occasionally it is good for us to search deeply about our faith and feeling. What is actually happening here on the Day of the Resurrection? Do I believe that Jesus rose from the dead or that He actually moldered away in the grave? Are you afraid and excited to the point where your nights come alive with the question "Does God live, or is He dead?" This kind of trembling restlessness - this acid working on your soul - might actually be desirable for many people for whom all of this is simply commonplace or taken for granted - for whom everything is much too smooth and much too easy. Get a little restless! - Make sure of your faith - especially if you have gotten comfortable!

Man has always been afraid of what he cannot comprehend. He feels uneasy ~~does not like~~ about anything that cannot be explained away in terms satisfactory to his own understanding. We do not like changes ~~By nature man loves to have no real godly purpose. He feels that~~ life would be much simpler ~~is~~ easier that way - without God, without change without the miraculous! But THIS IS THE RESURRECTION - and with it comes ~~this instills~~ a divine restlessness. What if this is so? Certainly ~~To be sure~~, this is a MIRACLE as certainly as is the world's creation. But miracles cannot be proved in the ordinary sense. Nothing in the world, connected with God, or eternity - with my soul, or with my conscience, can be proved. That is clear to all of us. But even that which cannot be proved can be witnessed by those who have experienced it. The Resurrection has its many witnesses - and then these women who came to the grave of Jesus that first Easter morning were the first ~~to witness it~~. Their restlessness

was rooted on the one hand in what they had seen and heard and, on the other hand, in the things that they had not seen and heard.

We emphasize first the things which they did not see and hear - the things which happened before the rising of the sun - before there was anything to see or hear. That was the glorification and exhaltation of the Crucified, accomplished through the power of God, His Heavenly Father. The Crucified is raised up! He lives! It was not merely the case of a dead man being raised to life, because this was no ordinary Resurrection; but this showed that the redemption of the world, the reconciliation through the Cross, was actually accomplished. Now there is peace with God - through God - accomplished by Jesus Christ, His only Son - PEACE for us poor sinful, guilt-laden people. Think of it! The glory of God enters into the beaten, broken body offered for the forgiveness of our sins. God says that He has accepted what His Son did and was. THIS has the deep and holy approval of God. All of this comes alive when you say, "Jesus lives!" It really does not mean too much unless you know that this life of Jesus is the ETERNAL LIFE of God Himself. Only in Him, the despised and rejected One, is God now present and alive in person. This came about in the unseen and in the unheard. Certainly you cannot see or hear this! It would be too hard to understand.

The creation of the world is something like this. It actually included everything and yet it can be seen in the perfection of any rose, or in the cry of every new born child. Everything proclaims God as Creator. Now the new creation has taken place! Everything that was old and shrivelled up died on Good Friday! The new creation has its glory and it is made in Christ, our Lord. The despised and rejected One becomes the key figure for the history of the whole world. No wonder He says, "I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the Ending; Behold, I have the keys of hell and of death." No wonder He says, "I am the Resurrection and the Life!" With the Resurrection of Christ a whole new world begins. Bodies moldering away in the earth these many years shall arise again in likeness of His glorified body. Never weaken in your faith about the new life! It is not only the assurance that all

our sins are forgiven, but also that He who forgave them in His death on the Cross now lives eternally, and we shall live with Him.

There was a play which was performed off Broadway a couple of years ago called,"Blue Dirk." Dirk was the name of a man who ate too much and drank too much, and, in general, did everything to excess. He got his name, "Blue Dirk" from the odd color which his face gradually assumed as he went ever more deeply into his own destruction. When the curtain rises, "Blue Dirk" is already in the middle of a deep introspection. He knows that he must change. He knows that he has to do something different - do something with his life. He keeps on asking the question, "Must Dirk do something to change his life - Must Dirk?" His wife, who hears him, begins to wonder whether he has lost his mind and gets out of the room very hurriedly. It seemed to her unthinkable that Dirk would no longer be Dirk, and just as unthinkable that he would always be the same.... It was not a very good play. It certainly was not a great play. But it was interesting to see that Dirk began to change - others began to change - had to change. His wife changed. The girl down the street, with whom he occasionally flirted, changed. Even the landlady begins to change. Only one remains exactly as he was and that is the landlord, Sam..... The play never tells you what started Dirk to think that he must change. It is something which has happened off stage which is simply taken for granted. It is one of those unseen, unheard things that shows itself in something that can be seen and heard.

For the time being, let us take this play as a kind of image of the Easter event. The real thing happened before the rising of the sun on Easter Day. These women were early risers, but God had been there before them - before the rising of the sun - and all the great things that had already happened.

You remember your dear dead in a very special way this Easter Day. Because Christ is alive there is a new feeling about their death. This One who died for all, "that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves but unto Him who died for them and rose again - this One gives hope to all the world and the blessed gift of the glory and the love of God.

Now that the sun has arisen, and the great Day of the Resurrection is fully come, now other things begin to happen. The unseen power rolled the stone away. The stones on the graves of the whole world are not nearly so secure any longer, since Christ rose from the dead. Unfortunately, we still seem to believe in almighty stones, and we still come wondering to the grave about, "Who will roll the stone away."

You know that the body of Jesus was never found! All the New Testament reports are unanimous in this regard. That is no proof of the Resurrection of Jesus. There might be one hundred different reasons for that. More important is that no one to this day can prove that Jesus is dead. Do you realize that the Angel is still there with the word, "Jesus lives?" The Angel makes you uneasy - you tremble when you see Him at the grave and hear Him speak. You would much rather not have Him there. Everything would go so much more smoothly - but the Angel cannot be driven away. To this day He is there with the message, "Jesus Lives" - a flash of lightning, a flaming finger, an unholy restlessness.

That is why so many cry out, "I protest, the stones must remain in their place! The dead have to be dead!" The rich seek to forget through their money that they are sinners. The artists seek to forget through their art that they are sinners. Soldiers seek to forget through their bravery that they are sinners. - Why should Dirk have to change? Dirk should stay Dirk - the good, old blue-nosed Dirk! ~~Only one~~, the landlord, Sam, keeps protesting, "To change is the worst thing you can do - it is positively indecent." The only change he knows or really feels is the stroke that he has at the end of the play.

You see - the Resurrection of our Lord is a glorious open road. It is not only something which refers to a past happening, but something which moves you forward to meet the future:"He will go before you into Galilee....there you will see Him." Easter is the promise of things to come. It promises a PERSONAL ENCOUNTER with the Resurrected Lord. That is the way the Easter faith of the Early Church was created. - By no means through an empty tomb, but THROUGH A SERIES OF ENCOUNTERS of

a highly personal nature with the Living Christ, recognizable by nail prints in His hands and feets, and the wound in His side. It is true Easter never ends. This you find behind you, and before you, yesterday and tomorrow, inside and outside. Easter never ends. The Resurrection opens up a glorious way. Three women stand at the grave - three utterly insignificant, undistinguished women. What became of them? They became the whole Christian Church, and if that should not be enough, out of this comes the Resurrection of all the dead, and out of this comes, finally, the last great Day - The Last Judgment - the glory of the Man who was dead and is alive forevermore!

Only this one thing more! Are you going to be afraid, or tremble, at the thought of the promise that Jesus is on the way to an encounter - to a meeting with YOU?! If during my ministry among you I have done anything to help you see the greatness, and the glory, and the peace, and the power, and the joy, and the triumphant hope of this life which is in Christ Jesus - the Crucified and Risen Redeemer -- then it has not been in vain. We do not have to make Easter - Christ made it long ago. More than all else I want to meet you before the throne of His glory.

Mou know how the play about "Blue Dirk" ended? In the last act Dirk finds himself in a church. "Must Dirk change? Must He really?" He falls on his knees and cries out into the space that is so full of all the unseen and the unheard things "Dirk wants to - he wants to change more than anything that he ever wanted before!" Hallelujah! The Lord is Risen! He is Risen indeed!

Amen.