

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
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**Easter Sunday, April 20, 2025**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 200, 210:1-3, 191, 193, 199.

Lessons: Isaiah 12:1-6, 1 Corinthians 15:51-57, John 20:1-18.

Sermon Text: Mark 16:1-8 and 1 Corinthians 15:19-28.

Sermon adapted by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of the risen Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed!

You see the word “vindication” in our sermon theme. That word means to clear someone from guilt, accusation, blame, suspicion, or doubt with supporting arguments or proof.

To be vindicated is to be cleared of guilt or to be proven right. If today’s theme is “Vindication,” who needed to be vindicated? Well, for starters, Jesus.

After what took place on Good Friday, it sure looked like Jesus was wrong, and guilty, and needed to be punished. He had been put on trial by the Jewish leaders and they declared him guilty of blasphemy and worthy of death. Pontius Pilate, representing the government who had authority to put him to death, had handed down the sentence: death by crucifixion. Crucifixion was not only one of the most painful ways to die, but it was also one of the most shameful and disgraceful forms of execution, usually reserved for the worst of criminals.

Today at the conclusion of the trial of Jesus Christ, the Son of God we see

**GOD ON TRIAL – THE VINDICATION**

- 1. Jesus is vindicated and**
- 2. We are vindicated because Jesus was vindicated.**

As Jesus hung between two criminals, bleeding and dying, he looked so weak and powerless. If he were as good or as powerful as he claimed to be, wouldn’t God rescue him? If he were God as he claimed to be, couldn’t he escape? But nothing happened. The women who had followed him watched as he breathed his last, just like every other person who had ever hung on a cross. When it was all over, they watched as Joseph of Arimathea took Jesus’ lifeless body and buried it in his own tomb.

As the sun was setting that night, it must have been impossible for the followers of Jesus to process everything that had happened in the last day. So much had happened so quickly. And things didn’t look good. As darkness settled over the land, there was silence, and the women were left alone with their thoughts.

In our world today, after a lengthy jury deliberation, a defendant might say, “Those were the longest hours of my life. It seemed like time was standing still.” There’s no way of knowing exactly what was going through the minds of Jesus’ followers in those hours, but it must have been a bitter mix of sadness, confusion, doubt, and fear.

Maybe you can relate to some of what they must have felt. Let’s talk about an example. Someone you loved deeply has died. The funeral is over, and your friends and family are on their way home. As darkness settles on the day, it’s too quiet, and you feel very alone. “Lord, I feel so lost. I just don’t understand.”

It’s not just the death of a loved one that can leave us feeling this way. The older we get, the more that thoughts of our own death are always lurking in the background. Whether or not we’re conscious of it, there’s this sense that time is running out, our bodies are failing, or our minds are fading. Even for the young, there is anxiety about making the right choices—friends, love, college, career. It’s the dizzying choices of a million possibilities and the recognition that time is limited. Against the backdrop of this brief life, our sinful choices appear like enlarged shadows, our every mistake is magnified in our minds.

And as we think about our sins, we think about how we have let down our Savior! Jesus wasn't guilty, but we sure are.

We might not know exactly what the women were thinking on Easter morning, but Mark tells us what they were doing. At break of dawn, they went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body—one final act of love for their teacher, for their friend, for their leader. But when they got there, they saw the stone rolled away and a young man in a white robe. ***“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.’ ”***

What did this mean? Even though Jesus had predicted his death and resurrection on a number of occasions, it seems it was too much for them to process. If the women had expected Jesus to be alive, they wouldn't have gone to his tomb to anoint his body! ***“Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb.”*** But soon it would sink in. Later that day, Jesus would appear to them—and to Peter and to the disciples on the road to Emmaus and to the Eleven behind locked doors. And later to the Eleven plus Thomas and then to five hundred believers at once. The early reports were corroborated again and again. The good news was true: “Victory!” was the headline. Vindication!

Paul spells it out in 1 Corinthians chapter 15. If Jesus had not risen, we would have no reason to believe that he was anything more than a fraud, another criminal dead from crucifixion. We would have no reason to think his words of forgiveness carried any weight. And we surely wouldn't expect to have any better fate after death. ***“If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead”*** (1 Corinthians 15:19,20).

Easter is vindication. Jesus didn't come down from the cross to prove that he was the Son of God. He couldn't because he loved you too much. He wouldn't because his work was not complete. Jesus didn't come down from the cross to prove that he was the Son of God. No, he did something even better: He rose from the dead! On Easter, Jesus was proved right: he is the God-man, the Messiah that he claimed to be.

Easter is vindication. Jesus did look guilty on the cross. He had been dragged before three courts. He had been whipped, scourged, beaten by his captors and crucified as a criminal. He was wearing a crown of thorns which made the blood run down his head.

It wasn't just the accusation of claiming to be a king nailed above his head. It wasn't the criminals on either side, or the mocking of the crowds that gave that impression that he was guilty. It was also his cry from the depths of punishment: ***“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*** (Matthew 27:46). Jesus did have guilt on the cross—not his own but ours. The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us. God punished Jesus for all our sins.

By raising his Son from the dead, the Father put the exclamation point on Jesus' own words from the cross: ***“It is finished!”*** Vindication! Those sins are paid for—your sins and my sins.

There's a hint of that forgiveness in the angel's message to the women: ***“Go, tell his disciples and Peter”*** (Mark 16:7). Why Peter? Remember the last thing that Peter had done to Jesus: he denied even knowing him. But Jesus' resurrection means that sin is forgiven, and Jesus wanted Peter to know it. Later, Jesus would personally forgive and reinstate him. “You denied me, but I will never forsake you.” This means that Jesus loves and forgives you too, even for the times you have doubted him, for your sinful choices under pressure, for your fear and despair. Jesus tells us “You have worried, doubted, and done all kinds of things, but never will I leave or forsake you.”

Easter is vindication also for those who have placed their hope in Jesus—like Job of long ago who declared, ***“I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth . . . in my flesh I will see God”*** (Job 19:25,26). Jesus' resurrection is proof that Job was right. It's proof for us too. If Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, we do have hope beyond this life. Paul calls Jesus the ***“firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep”*** (1 Corinthians 15:20). The firstfruits were a symbol, a promise, of the whole harvest to come. So Jesus' resurrection is the promise of the resurrection for all his people: ***“Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him”*** (1 Corinthians 15:23). That day will be our ultimate vindication.

But even now, Easter is vindication for us as we live as people who are mocked and judged by this world. There has been a lot of talk about the decline of the Christian church in the United States. Fewer people in this country follow Jesus, church attendance is down, and its citizens are becoming more secular. Even Christians may say, “The church is dying.” Is that possible? Yes, the visible church may be dying. But the Holy Christian

Church, the invisible communion of all true believers is alive because it is the body of the risen Christ. Congregations may die and Christians may fall away, but as long as Jesus lives, so does his church. We have been proven right. We are vindicated!

For us, then, this is the feast of victory for our God, a celebration which continues for Christians yet today! We may be afflicted by temptation and trouble and harassed and mocked by a hostile world. But we are on a triumphal march to glory. Along the way, our lives have eternal significance as we love God, love our neighbors, and even love our enemies, and as we testify to the truth. The march goes on in simple, humble ways until finally we sing the victory song with saints and angels in heaven.

Sin is forgiven. Death is defeated. Jesus is Lord. Christ and his people have been put on trial, and Easter brings the victorious verdict: Vindication! Alleluia! Amen.

Adapted from **God on Trial: Vindication** from the NPH 2024 Lenten series.