

SERMON
 First Lutheran Church
 Aitkin, Minnesota

John 20:1-18
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen
 April 1, 2018

KIDS' MESSAGE

Kids, hundreds of years before Jesus was born, an ancient writer announced God's promise to come and save God's people. **"Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. The Lord is God, and he has given us light. Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will give thanks to you. O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever."** (Psalm 118:26-29) The Psalm writer says someone is **coming to give God's light and love to people forever.** And the people are so glad that they are going to have a **"festal," "thank you" parade!**

Remember **Palm Sunday?** **We paraded** around the church **waving palm branches** and shouting **Hosanna!** We were joining the people of Israel in welcoming Jesus. They thought he was a wonderful king who would win a big battle over the enemy Roman army and set God's people free. Instead, the Romans killed Jesus. Remember the cross they nailed Jesus to and the tomb they buried him in. Dead. No more Jesus. No more king. He's gone. Is that right?

Wrong. What happened on **Easter Sunday** morning? Jesus came back out of that tomb, **alive again.** Jesus wasn't just a king of Israel. **Jesus is God. Jesus beat evil and even death.** He came back to love and care for all people, you and me too. He came back to adopt us into God's family. Jesus is here with us right now. And when we finally die, what will happen? Jesus will bring us to live with God in heaven forever. **Now that is worth an even better festal parade!**

Last week we paraded around waving palm branches to welcome **Jesus the king.** But Jesus is more than a king! **Jesus rose from the dead and is God.** That is way bigger than people expected. And we know that Jesus is **here with us right now.** Let's **welcome and thank Jesus** for rising from the dead and being here with us today and every day. Let's parade around again **waving colorful cloths** and **shouting:** Kids - **Jesus is risen!** Adults - **Thank you God!** Everybody - **Amen!**

ADULT MESSAGE

What brought you to First Lutheran today? How many of you are from out of town? Welcome home to Aitkin, to First Lutheran. We've had lots of deaths in this faith family during the past year. **Clarisse Jackman** died on Maundy Thursday. I've discovered here at First, funerals are almost like a big family reunion, or an Aitkin class reunion. And it seems like almost everybody who ever shows up here had **Don Hagestuen** as their teacher. **Funerals include good worship, good family, good friends, good food and good faith.**

Look at the comic I clipped out of the paper a few weeks ago. "**Sally Forth.**" The husband and wife are lying in bed together. He says, "**Today was the longest day of my life. . .** He goes on, "**Everything happened. Everything changed just. . . just like that. . .**" In the next frame, he says, "**Yesterday I got a call. Today I called relatives, friends . . . a funeral home. . .**" Next frame, he goes on, "**And here I am, back in my childhood home. Back in my old bedroom. And everything is familiar, yet it will never be the same. . .**" "**It's all changed. It's all now a hard line between what was and what is. . .**" Finally comes the humor part, looking at the wall next to his old childhood bed, he says, "**All except my old R.E.M. poster. You'd think they would have taken that down when they converted my room into a home office.**" Finally, his wife responds, "**Maybe it reminded your dad of you. Plus, it takes the eye off all the filing cabinets.**"

They came home for his dad's funeral. Has this happened to you yet? Coming home for a dying loved one. There at the bedside, questions arise. "**Has everybody made it home yet? Did everyone get to see Mom?**" "**Goodbye, we love you. . .**" Then comes death and funeral.

Eight hundred years before Jesus was born, God, through an ancient psalmist, made some promises. They are written down in **Psalm 139.**

- **God dreamt you up** before you were conceived in your mother's womb.
- **God knows and cares about everything** that happens in your life.
- **There is nowhere you can go where God won't be there for you** – close to home or at the other end of the earth, heaven or hell, life or death. . . God promises to be there for you.

How far have you traveled in your life? Had some victories? Some defeats? Some amazing days? Some horrendous days? Have you been **running from God?** **Running with God?** Have you ever been **too weak or tired to run at all?**

After Jesus rose from the dead and went back to heaven, the **Apostle Paul**, once he'd stopped killing Christians, proclaimed in **Romans 8** that God is at work in all things **seeking to bring about good** among those who love him. This doesn't mean God causes everything that happens. It means God will be there for us no matter what happens, no matter what sort of trouble we are **victimized by** or **bring upon ourselves**. And Paul goes on to assure that there is **nothing in all the world** – hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril or sword – **nothing in all the world** – angels, rulers, powers, **even death that can separate us from the love of God** which is ours through Jesus Christ. Has God been at work seeking to bring about good in your life, family, church or world? Does God have a good, firm hold on you?

It was the first day of the week. The Sabbath was over, so Mary, the woman Jesus had cast all of the demons out of, came to visit his tomb. Death had won. Jesus' followers had been so hopeful, but the **same as always before, sin, death and the power of evil carried the day. The bullies, the powerful got the last word – death to Jesus.** . . . Mary discovered an open tomb. It doesn't say she looked inside. She determined that she'd better go and get the men out of hiding, those first disciples, to come and see. Peter and John took the risk and came to investigate. Peter entered the tomb first and found the linen wrappings that had bound Jesus' body and there was the cloth that had been on his head. John came next, went in, saw the empty tomb and "**believed.**" Believed what? All he saw was no body. It doesn't say anything about what Peter thought. All we hear is that they still didn't understand the scripture that promised Jesus would rise from the dead. Then the two men went back home. Lots of help those men were.

Mary stood weeping by the tomb. Then she looked into the tomb herself and saw two angels. Next thing you know, Mary sees Jesus, but she thinks he is maybe the gardener and asks him where she might find Jesus' body. Jesus **calls Mary by name**. Then she knew him. Then Jesus gave Mary a life-changing, life-giving

message to share with her world, **“Go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and to your Father, to my God and to your God.’”** Jesus’ murder on that cross should have been the end of humanity. The end of any hope for us. Yet, despite betrayal, denial, cowardice – Jesus was still ready to claim them as children of God. Despite shouts of “crucify,” spikes driven into his wrists and ankles, Jesus was still ready to love and forgive the whole world of humanity. And the same is true for you and me and the rest of the fickle world that Jesus lived, died and rose again for. Mary ran back to them and said, **“I have seen the Lord!”** God came here two thousand years ago, and clearly said, **“I created you. I love you. I want you to be mine forever. Trust and follow me.”** And Jesus has come again in Word, Sacraments, and Holy Spirit,

- To **name and claim you** in baptism.
- To **welcome you home to this family table** where every person who dines, again and again, receives forgiveness, healing, renewal and power to fully live as beloved and trusting children of God!

How many of you have come here from out of town again? How did you come here? What was your frame of mind? Doubtful? Questions? Strong and joyous faith? Eight hundred years before the time of Christ, the writer of **Psalm 139** wrote, **“I come to the end and I am still with you.”** That’s the promise. Easter promise. Signed in the blood of the Lamb. Even death can’t take us away from God. **Welcome home.**

Sometimes you come home for a **funeral**. Today you are here for a **resurrection**. First Jesus rose from the dead on Easter morning. Then all God’s children who have gone on ahead of us rise. **Finally comes the day when you and I will die. What happens then? Death loses. God wins. Love carries the day.**

Jesus’ victory over sin, death and evil is **not just about us trusting** that we **will be carried home to heaven** in the **loving arms of Jesus** when we **die**. Jesus’ life, death and resurrection is about us **trusting** that we **are being carried** in the **loving arms of Jesus every day** of our lives **and** on **our last day will be carried home to heaven as well**. Thanks be to God. Amen.