

*A Breath of Life from the Wilderness - 104 - Easter Sunday B*

*Christ is risen, alleluia! He is truly risen, alleluia!*

*There we have it, brothers and sisters, the tomb in which Jesus lay from Good Friday afternoon until early this morning, that tomb lies empty, and there have been reliable witnesses to establish this fact for all time. However, there are plenty of doubts that Jesus rose from the dead. In fact people are still writing books to disprove Jesus' resurrection.*

*There are three steps to take in order to verify the reliability of the testimonies about Jesus' resurrection. First, verify the reliability of the historical documents. Second, verify the reliability of the human witnesses. Third, see for yourself.*

*Every book in the Bible started out as an oral proclamation. In those days before radio, or television, or telephones, or computers, or writing machines, or even paper, there was only the spoken word or parchments for people with lots of money. All over the Earth human beings had developed an amazing ability to pay attention and to remember word for word what they heard other people say or sing, especially when what they saw and heard was dramatic.*

*The 4 Gospels we have started out as collections of Jesus' words and actions and of the events concerning Jesus, which were told and retold orally, from memory. Disciples with money offered parchments and writing instruments and those who could read and write committed to writing these episodes which, a few decades after Jesus' ascension into heaven, were collected in the form of these 4 Gospels we have today.*

*Of all the writings in any culture or land – from the Greek philosophers to the Roman historians and playwrights – the oldest and most reliable ancient parchments we have are the Gospels and other books of the New Testament. The oldest texts of the Greek philosophers are later copies from a thousand years ago or less, but the vast majority of writing from ancient Rome and Greece has been lost altogether.*

*The Vatican museum and other museums around the world have original manuscripts of the Gospels and New Testament books going back to within a century or two of their original composition, and there are thousands of copies. No serious historian would question that the Gospels are authoritative historical documents. Step one shows the Gospels are reliable.*

*We heard today from Peter, the same man who denied Jesus three times out of fear of being arrested along with Jesus. The next day Jesus died and was put in a tomb. Those who doubt that Jesus rose from the dead cannot explain how not only Peter, but all of the apostles except Judas – who committed suicide – enthusiastically proclaimed that Jesus rose from the dead and is alive today. They continued to give their testimony consistently until they were put to death for it, and even torture and execution could not deter them from telling the truth.*

*There is no other explanation to the strength of testimony given by the apostles and countless other disciples. Jesus truly rose from the dead and his relationship with them was the*

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*only explanation for their confidence and enthusiasm even onto death. Step two shows that the many witnesses to Jesus' resurrection are credible and reliable.*

*That leaves step number three. We are all free to see for ourselves.*

*We heard Peter testify that "with the Holy Spirit and with power... Jesus went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him." Jesus continues to heal today people who are oppressed by the devil. It's happening all over the world. I once received a young woman 26 years old who was so terrified she was shaking. As I listened to her, she told me about friends taking out a Ouija board and going along with it, but since then she couldn't shake a terrible darkness and fear that prevented her from sleeping.*

*In answer to my questions she told me that she didn't go to church, she didn't open the Bible, and she wasn't praying. I told her about God, what God has been doing for humanity since the beginning of time, and most recently, what Jesus said and did. I opened the Bible and read a few verses from the Gospel. I asked her if she would be willing to pray with me and she said yes. So we prayed, and after a while, I offered her an opportunity for confession.*

*The secret of confession remains intact and I will never reveal anything, not even the name of a penitent, and even the details I've related are changed. The point is that I saw Jesus set this person free before my very eyes. The change was astounding and long lasting.*

*In his Gospel John relates how Mary Magdalene became the first witness who met Jesus after his resurrection. She saw and spoke with him. Like countless others since then, her life was also completely changed for the better once she opened up her mind, heart, and spirit to Jesus and decided to put all her trust in him. She had such unshakable confidence in Jesus that she refused to leave Jesus' side all during his way to the cross and crucifixion. She was there with Mary, Jesus' mother, and another Mary and John the young apostle, until Jesus died and was laid in the tomb. Today, on that first Easter Sunday, Mary was the one who saw Jesus first.*

*Why was Mary Magdalene the one Jesus chose to meet after his resurrection? The answer is simple. She was the only one to stick around long enough for him to show himself. Peter and John came to the tomb and took one look, but then they left. Have you noticed that even today people don't let the phone ring long enough for you to get to the phone and pick it up, or they don't wait long enough for you to get to the door and open it after you heard the door bell ring? What is our problem that we seem to be so unwilling to take the time for any worthwhile experience to unfold at its own pace?*

*We say we want something, but we're unwilling to take the time necessary in order to get that thing or to have that experience or to meet that person we think or say that we want.*

*In the first of two possible selections from Paul's letters this morning we could hear Paul tell the Colossians and us to "set our minds on things that are above, not on things that are on*

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*earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.” In the other reading from his letter to the Corinthians Paul tells them and us to “clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are leavened; for our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”*

*Yeast is what makes the dough rise while bread is being made. What are the things that give me or my life a rise in the course of daily living? It could be any of a number of human experiences, impulses, thoughts, emotions, or actions such as impulses to have too much of food or alcohol or drugs or medications, or else to give in to sexual thoughts or impulses. We need to wake up, brothers and sisters, and realize that only in the past few years open season has been declared on us and on our children and youth.*

*I’m talking about the plague of pornography. Pornography comes straight out of hell, an inspiration of Satan himself, I have no doubt. God made our human life – including our human sexuality and fertility – good and beautiful. God made human sex so beautiful, pleasurable, and powerful in order to cement a woman and man together as wife and husband and strengthen them to face the challenges of life as they bring children into the world and give them the formation they need in order to meet God, come to love him, and with God’s guidance go on to live meaningful and fruitful lives.*

*Satan has perverted what God made beautiful and by revealing too much about what we look like in our physical bodies, pornography eclipses what is most true and beautiful about who and what we are as human beings created in the image and likeness of God. By luring us into watching sexual doings the devil distracts those who watch porn from what life and love is really about. Porn is about using other people to take what we think we want, but God gave us the ability to make of our life a gift for others out of love.*

*Going all the way is not about removing our clothes. Going all the way is about giving our life to another, giving ourselves completely to another out of love and caring service, either in marriage, or in religious community life, or as a deacon, priest, or bishop.*

*Like any good parent, God our Father wants us to have the satisfaction of living our life as fully and as meaningfully as we can; so that we might bear abundant fruit of love and care for others and for our beautiful world. This is why Jesus accepted to die – to reveal how empty are the ruses and tricks of Satan – and to demonstrate that God continues to love us even when we don’t care, even when we hate and commit every kind of evil and sin, even when we torture and kill his only begotten Son in his human life.*

*Jesus is risen from the dead. He is alive and present right here, right now. The third step is to see for ourselves and open our mind, heart, and soul to Him. Peace be with you.*