



1616 W. Mequon Road, Mequon WI 53092

(262)241-3121 [www.stjohnsmequon.org](http://www.stjohnsmequon.org)

Email: [office@stjohnsmequon.org](mailto:office@stjohnsmequon.org)

**Pastor James Tiefel**

**(262) 853-9723 (cell#)**

**Email: [pastortiefel@gmail.com](mailto:pastortiefel@gmail.com)**

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Building Blocks Christian Learning Center  
[bbclc@stjohnsmequon.org](mailto:bbclc@stjohnsmequon.org)

## **The First Sunday of Easter The Resurrection of Our Lord**

### **Prayer of the Day**

Almighty God, by the glorious resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ you conquered death and opened the gate to eternal life. Grant that we, who have been raised with him through baptism, may walk in newness of life and ever rejoice in the hope of sharing his glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

### **First Reading** – Isaiah 25:6-9

The resurrection swallows up death forever.

### **Second Reading** – I Corinthians 15:50-57

Jesus will change our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body.

### **Gospel** – Luke 24:1-12

The Easter announcement: Jesus is not here. He is risen!

### Sermon – 1 Corinthians 15:50-57

**I declare to you brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

### **Easter Changes Us**

They must have been exhausted. The sun was peeking over the horizon, but it was still dark. Nobody’s really awake when it’s still dark. But the physical exhaustion wasn’t the worst of it. They were exhausted emotionally. Friday had just torn them up. And then there was no time to do anything right. The Sabbath began at 6:00 pm. so they had only three hours to claim the body from the governor, remove the body from the cross, carry the body to the tomb, and clean the blood away. The men did the basics; they wrapped the body with strips of linen and placed a cloth over Jesus’ head. Joseph closed the tomb and then everyone left for home. No time for spices and the ointments now, but the body would start to decay, so they hurried on Sunday morning. They knew exactly what they would find: Jesus’ dead body. They

expected it. But then the body was gone and angels were there instead: **Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!** That wasn't at all what they were expecting. Easter changed these women forever.

When he was still Saul, St. Paul never expected to see a living Jesus. To him the resurrection was nothing more than propaganda for a wannabe prophet. But then Jesus was there on the road to Damascus, and he was very much alive. That wasn't what Paul was expecting, not at all. Easter changed Paul forever. So when Paul became a missionary and wrote a letter to Christians in the city of Corinth, he wrote about Easter: **For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.** And then he made Easter practical; this is what the resurrection means for you. If Christ came back to life after he was dead, then you will come back to life after you're dead.

That was not what some of the people in Corinth were expecting. So Paul told what they could expect—and this is where today's Second Reading begins: **Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.**

Our lives are pretty predictable. I mean, we have highs and lows, but we kind of know what to expect. The sun rises and the sun sets; we wake up and we go to sleep. We grow up and we grow old. We get sick or injured and we get better. If we don't get better, we die and they plant us in a cemetery. That's the way life works; that's what everyone expects life to be.

But Easter changes that. If Jesus is alive—and he surely is alive—then he's coming back. At a certain point in time, we are going to hear a trumpet blast like we've never heard before. And then, faster than scientists can split an atom and faster than you can blink your eyes, dead bodies will rise from their final resting places and they will be very much alive. Easter changes everything. It changes what we expect out of life and it changes what we expect after death. Every single Sunday we confess in the Creed that we believe in the resurrection of the dead or the resurrection of the body. Life goes on, of course, but not in the same way. With Easter, we live our lives with our eyes peeled and our ears perked up waiting for the trumpet. We know that the sight and the sound of Jesus' return is always just around the corner. With Easter we pray more, we study more, we worship more, and we're more careful about what we think and say and do. So Easter changes us because it changes our expectations. With Easter we know that something big is on its way.

So the women raced back to Jerusalem as fast as they could to tell the eleven disciples. You can almost imagine them falling all over themselves to spill out the news. Luke wrote down what happened: **They did not believe the women because their words seemed to them like nonsense.** Peter and John needed to see for themselves. They found the tomb, they looked inside, they saw the burial garments, but Jesus' body was gone. Luke tells us that **they went away wondering what had happened.** John admits in his Gospel that **they didn't understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.** Obviously, there were a lot of confused people on Easter morning.

Without Easter, people are always confused. The Corinthians certainly were. Paul heard about their confusion. First, he went after their doubts about the resurrection. Then he addressed another question: **But how are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?** I get that question. We all ask it. For as long as we can remember we've believed that when believers die their souls go to heaven and their bodies will rise from their graves on the last day. But the confusion is still here: When we rise from death, what kind of body will we have? Will I still wear glasses? Will I need my cane? Will Grandma have gray hair? Will babies be babies? What about my neighbor who lost a leg in Vietnam? What about the people whose bodies were annihilated on 9/11?

The problem is sin. Sin is in us and sin is around us. We commit sins ourselves and we endure the sins of others. Everybody and everything suffers because sin is everywhere. Think of what pollution does to plants or what poaching does to animals. Think about rust and rot. Sin attacks our bodies, too. The truth is that we begin to die the moment we're born. Toddlers fall down the steps: nothing more than a few bumps and a good scare. A 20 year-old falls down the same stairs, not so good: a cast for six weeks. Dad can't run like his son can and grandpa can't see like his grandson can. Our bodies age. We call that decay. And when they decay enough, we die. Because of sin, decay and death are as much a part of life as talking and walking. St. Paul wrote, **I declare to you brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot**

**inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.** Something has to change. People whose bodies decay and die can't go to heaven where bodies never decay and never die.

Here's what happens: **For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.** At the moment Jesus comes again he will work a mighty miracle on each of us to change us from what we were on earth—decaying and dying—to what we will be in heaven: undecaying and undying. Paul wrote: **For the perishable must be clothed with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality.** At the moment of his coming, Jesus will instantly change our bodies—whether they're decaying and already dead or decaying but not dead yet—with that miracle **he will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.** Glasses, canes, gray hair, missing limbs, nothing but ashes? Do we really care? Does it really make a difference? St. John wrote: **Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.** We don't need to know more. Easter changes us because it ends our confusion about the future.

It's impossible for us to know how those women felt on Easter morning. A), the body of Jesus was gone and B), angels were there gleaming like lightening. The women were absolutely terrified. They had seen Jesus die on the cross; they saw Jesus dead in the tomb. That he should be alive? Impossible! Ridiculous! So, the angel took them back to Jesus: **Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.** The angel took their attention off their fears and their fright and focused their attention on Jesus. That changed everything. **Then they remembered his words.**

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he was dealing with doubts and denials about death and resurrection. He handled the denials first and then he addressed the doubts. But in the end, he changed their attention by taking them to Jesus. **When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Here is the reality. Sin is the venomous stinger that poisons our bodies and makes them decay and die. So, Jesus came to take on sin. He died and then he rose and he conquered sin and he conquered the serpent who causes sin. His death accomplished the victory and his resurrection assured the victory. From God's perspective our sins are gone and so is the law that exposes our sins. There is no hell for us. The Bible says, **There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. We are all the children of God through faith in Christ Jesus.** God forgives us, he adopts us, he cares for us, he protects us, and he prepares us for the trumpet blast. For now, we still have to deal with the decay and the death of our bodies, but when we hear the trumpet blast, the last enemy to be destroyed, that enemy called death, that enemy **will be swallowed up in victory.** No longer perishable, no longer mortal, our bodies and souls will live in total perfection forever. **Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.** That's what Easter does. It directs our faith to Jesus.

Easter changed everything on that first Easter Day. It changed the women who went to the tomb and it changed the men who went out to the world. Easter changes us, too. Easter changes us because now we expect that Jesus will come again to raise us from death to life. Easter changes us because it removes the confusion about what we will be like when we rise from our graves. Easter changes us because it draws our attention away from ourselves to the Savior who died and rose again that we may live forever. Believe that change. Live in that change. Enjoy that change. Rejoice in that change. Christ is arisen. He is risen indeed. Amen.

Pastor James Tiefel