

Sermon for Easter Sunday

Date: April 5, 2026

Location: Zion – Colby, WI

Old Testament: Exodus 14:10–15:1

Epistle Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:1–11

Gospel Reading: John 20:1–18



Sermon Series: Songs of Hope in the Dark Night

Sermon Title: The Night Is Over

Sermon Text: John 20:1–18

Hymns:

LSB 465 – Now All the Vault of Heaven Resounds (v.1,4)

LSB 439 – O Dearest Jesus, What Law Hast Thou Broken (v. 15)

LSB 633 – At the Lamb’s High Feast We Sing

LSB 480 – He’s Risen, He’s Risen (v.1,4,5)

Distribution:

LSB 490 – Jesus Lives! The Victory’s Won


LSB 633 – At the Lamb’s High Feast We Sing

LSB 474 – Alleluia! Jesus Is Risen

LSB 461 – I Know That My Redeemer Lives

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Text: John 20:1–18

¹Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. ²So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.”

³So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. ⁴Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, ⁷and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself.

⁸Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰Then the disciples went back to their homes.

¹¹But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. ¹²And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. ¹³They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?”

She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.”

¹⁴Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus said to her, “**Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?**”

Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.”

¹⁶Jesus said to her, “**Mary.**”

She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher).

¹⁷Jesus said to her, “**Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’**”

¹⁸Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her.

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Alleluia! Christ is Risen.
He is risen indeed. Alleluia!



Introduction – Where We Left Off

We have walked a long road together. Through this season we listened to Hope in the Dark and Songs in the Night. Songs sung quietly. Songs prayed through clenched teeth. Songs whispered when God felt far away.

We stood with the faithful who waited, wondered, questioned, and endured. We followed Jesus into the wilderness, to the cross, and into the silence of the tomb. That road was not rushed. The darkness was not ignored. The night was real.

The reason and power in Easter begins exactly there. Not at noon. Not in full daylight. Easter begins before sunrise, while fear still lingers and questions remain unanswered. God does His greatest work in our darkest hours.

I. Night at the Edge of the Sea – Fear Before Deliverance



In the first reading the people of Israel stand trapped. Behind them Pharaoh's army closes in. Ahead of them the sea blocks the way. On either side nothing but fear. The Bible says they cried out to the Lord.¹ Their cry carries more panic than prayerful confidence

They had heard God's promises. They had seen His awesome power in Egypt. Still, when the night pressed in, and death felt inevitable it was harder to hold on to faith.

The night feels final. The situation looks irreversible. Death appears certain. That is where God meets them.

II. Night at the Tomb – Fear Before Resurrection

In the Gospel reading Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb early, while it is still dark.² She expects death to be found where it was laid. Then she sees the stone has been moved. Fear rises immediately. She runs to the disciples and cries out, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb."³



Grief clouds her sight. Hope does not yet enter her mind. Peter and John run to the tomb. John arrives first and looks inside. Peter pushes past him and steps into the darkness of the grave.⁴ The linen cloths lie there neatly folded.

Since when does Death give up what it takes? Something strange has begun; something new. Still, no one yet understands what has happened. That first Easter doesn't begin with understanding. Easter begins with surprise and fear.

- 1 Exodus 14:10-12
- 2 John 20:1
- 3 John 20:2
- 4 John 20:6-7

III. God Acts While Fear Watches



Mary remains outside the tomb weeping. When she finally looks inside, two angels sit where the body of Jesus had been.⁵ Even heaven bears witness, “The grave cannot hold Him.”

Then there’s a voice behind her. She thinks it is the gardener. She doesn’t look up. Grief still clouds her sight. The resurrected and victorious Christ stands only a few steps away, and she cannot see it.

Then Jesus says one word, “Mary.”

In that moment the night breaks and the Light of the World shines in her eyes.

Recognition floods in. She turns and cries out, “Rabboni!”⁶ There is shock, elation, confusion not knowing which way to go or what to believe. The risen Lord is not an idea, a premonition or vision. He is alive. He stands before her.

Just as the sea opened before Israel, the grave has opened before those who follow Jesus. The victory belongs to the Lord. He shuts Fear’s mouth. He silences Doubt’s strength. He brings down our greatest fears. The Bible gives us the Easter song:

The right hand of the Lord does valiantly;
I shall not die, but live⁷

The night does not defeat God’s promise. Darkness cannot overcome His light.⁸



IV. The Gospel Handed On – Victory Proclaimed

Easter faith rests on what actually happened, not on just how it felt. The Bible does not not rely on emotions. It proclaims actual events. The resurrection stands at the center of the Church’s life, purpose, and hope. Without it faith collapses and is meaningless.⁹ With it death collapses and is defeated.¹⁰

V. Fear Gives Way to Mission

Jesus sends Mary with the first Easter proclamation. “Go to My brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God.’ ”¹¹

The first witness of Easter is not a king, priest or pastor. It is a grieving woman who has just heard her name spoken by the risen Lord. God does not wait for, or even look for, perfect faith. He sends trembling witnesses. He sends forgiven sinners. He sends those who have heard and seen what death could not hold.



5 John 20:12
6 John 20:16
7 Psalm 118:16–17
8 John 1:5
9 1 Corinthians 15:14
10 1 Corinthians 15:26
11 John 20:17

The Church today still is carrying good news instead of burial spices. Life replaces mourning. Proclamation replaces silence.

Easter faith grows because Christ continues to appear, forgive, and send.

Conclusion – Songs After the Night

Israel sang on the far shore of the sea. The Church sings on the far side of death. In both cases the enemy lies in defeat. The night has not been ignored. It has been overcome. We don't pretend the darkness is not there. We see it has been shattered. Jesus lives!



The risen Lord who called Mary by name still calls His people today: in Holy Baptism, in Confession and Forgiveness, in His Holy Supper and in His living Holy Word.

The reason for our Hope in the Dark, the reason for our Songs in the Night is because the one in whom we have hope, the one who hears our songs, is alive.








Light stands fulfilled.
Light fills the world.
Light is the empty cross.
Light is what fills this sanctuary.

Look to the cross. Look to that place of torture and death. Look and do not be afraid because the cross is empty! He is not there. The cross is as empty as the tomb.

That horrid thing has become the very symbol of our faith. Carry it with you wherever you go. Wear it as a necklace, tie it around your wrist. Let it be known you are saved because of Jesus the Holy Christ of God. Proclaim for all to hear:

Alleluia. Christ is risen.
He is risen indeed. Alleluia.
Amen.

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