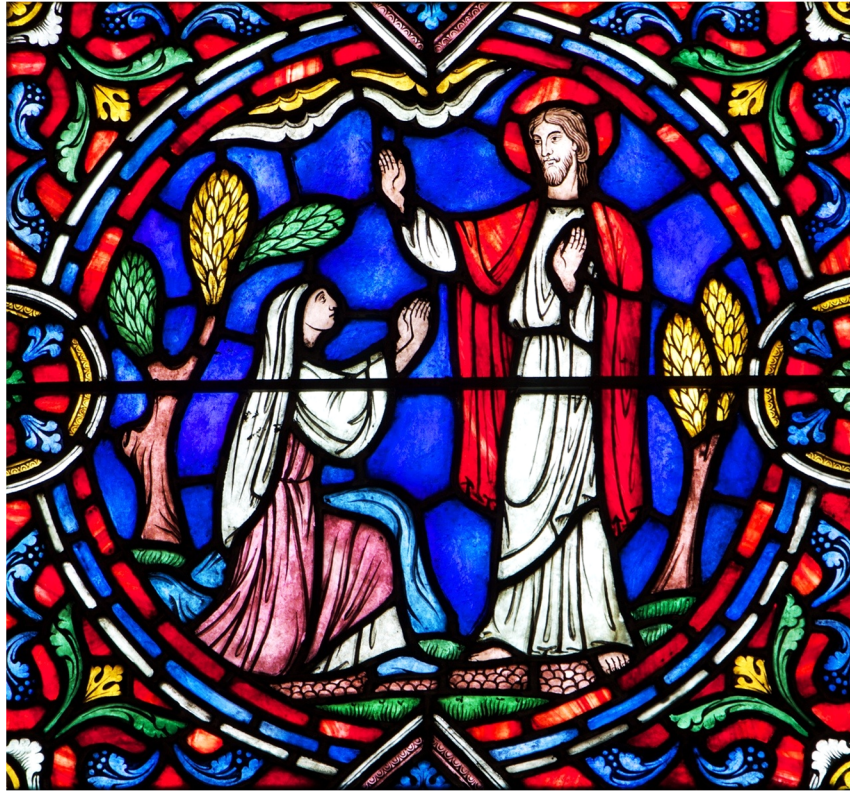


# Victory 101: The Rising of the Son

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle



*"Resurrected Christ with Mary Magdalene." Glencairn Museum.*

## Prayer of Illumination

O Lord our God, your Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Give us grace to receive your truth in faith and love, that we may be obedient to your will and live always for your glory; through Jesus Christ our Savior.  
Amen.

## Scripture: Mark 16:1-8 (NRSV)

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they

laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you."

So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

*The grass withers and the flower fades,  
but the Word of God endures forever.*

## SERMON – *The Rising of the Son*



Winston Churchill once said, "when you're going through hell, don't stop."

In Homer's *Odyssey*, the hero Odysseus follows the same general principle.



His twenty-year long and winding path home required him to go to Hades and back. It was there he would receive the next phase of directions to get back to Ithaca. Once Odysseus got what he

needed, he knew he had to “get the Hades out of Hades.” He saw what happened to his comrades who decided to make Hades their home.

He saw:

- **Agamemnon** stuck in resentment and rage over his wife’s infidelity and murder of him with her lover.
- **Achilles** stewing in regret that he didn’t live to old age.
- **Ajax** nursing a grudge that Odysseus beat him in a footrace.

These characters were hopelessly stuck in their past—paralyzed by “if-lys” that they refused to let go of. Their past monopolized and dominated their present and their future.

They became imprisoned in and defined by their: unfulfilled expectations, unrealized desires, and bitter regrets over bad decisions. They refused to change or budge.

This is a human problem that has plagued us since the beginning of time. We consign and resign ourselves to Hades because we can’t or won’t reframe and redefine our trauma, trials, and tribulations. But Odysseus was different. Following Circe’s wise guidance, he was able to go to Hades and back—forever changed.

Encountering death taught Odysseus to:

- face his shadows,
- make peace with disappointments,
- reframe his regrets,
- maintain healthy boundaries, and
- stay focused on the journey—which was to make it back home, changed and transformed.

Jesus, the Word made flesh, entered history into time and space, his own creation. And he went to Hades and back—not for himself, but for us. He did it for you and for me. For the world.

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”*

On Easter, the stone, the very large stone Mark tells us, was rolled away. There’s no stone too big for God to roll away.

Jesus went through Hades and high water” for us, and lived to tell about it.

In our gospel reading, the sabbath is over. Life is back to normal, at least for everyone who didn’t know Jesus.

The three women who witnessed Jesus’ death and burial were together again. Out of devotion and tenderness, Mary, Mary, and Salome hadn’t forgotten Jesus. Early that Sunday morning they bought spices to anoint Jesus for a proper burial that he did not yet receive because of the Sabbath. We’re told it was just after sunrise. This was a foreshadowing—

The sun and the Son had just risen as they approached the tomb.

But the three women had more questions than answers. Resurrection wasn't on their minds. They didn't even have a clue as to how they would move the massive tombstone. Yet still they went. They showed up. This is a key principle of faith. You keep going, even when you can't see the way or know what's happening. Don't stop. But Mark lets us know, the whole time the stone was already rolled away. The women just couldn't see it because they were looking down.

Now I don't know about you, but I've got this "looking down" thing to a science in my life. It's so easy to navel gaze or shoe gaze and get so focused on our problems or ourselves that we become downcast. Wallowing in our problems, we fail to look up, to look around, to take a closer look.

When the women adjusted their gaze upward, they realized their problem wasn't even a problem. They took a closer look and saw that the stone was already rolled away.

What was it Mark Twain once said?

*I've been through some terrible things in my life, some of which actually occurred.*

So Mary, Mary, and Salome took a collective gulp and went into the open tomb. The stone wasn't rolled away for Jesus, that couldn't hold him in even if it stayed. The stone was rolled away for these women so they could see Jesus wasn't there. There was no dead body to anoint. That had already been done by the nameless woman with the alabaster jar before Jesus died.

You see, it takes guts to go into those deep, dark places, and face our uncertainties, our questions, like Mary, Mary, and Salome. It's not comfortable to step into the void and emptiness in our lives, to go through our fear, rather than around it. But this is where new life is found.

The three were petrified because, not only was Jesus' body not there, there was a young man dressed in white, an angel. They were scared spitless, and so would we be. In fact, Mark uses four different words for four different kinds of fear here. These kinds of fear are good to have in our lives—wondering, shock, reverence, awe, amazement, trembling, bewilderment, and dumbfoundedness. We need a faith that's re-enchanted by the resurrection where, we marvel at the miraculous. A faith that doesn't just think, but a faith that feels and experiences and takes it all in with wide-eyed wonder.

There's a Latin phrase for this: *mysterium tremendum*. It's the jaw-dropping and awe-inspiring wonder and speechlessness we feel in the presence of the Almighty, where we're both fascinated and freaked out by how real and powerful our God is.

We feel a holy insecurity, a smallness, yet a connection to the Holy. A sense of peace, while also being stirred. *Mysterium tremendum*.

And so the man in white says what angels almost always say:

*Be not afraid. Don't be alarmed.*

Jesus has been raised. He's not here among the dead. The Crucified One is now the Risen One.

The angel gives more instructions:

Look. Go into the grave. See for yourselves. He's not here. He's gone.

This was no longer Jesus' tomb. We often look for Jesus in the wrong places. He's not in the tomb, he's out there, alive and well, living and breathing, and out ahead of us. So go, go follow in his footsteps. Go and tell his disciples, especially Peter, that he's going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you all along. Not here, there. He's gone back home, changed. Go back there and meet him. You'll be changed too on your journey. Tell the disciples. Especially Peter.

I'm guessing Peter was putting himself through hell. Raking himself over the coals, beating himself up over his denial and disloyalty to Jesus. Instead of shaming or ostracizing Peter, Jesus calls Peter to begin again. No chiding or correcting. No demanding explanations. Jesus doesn't even the score. No, he invites Peter to shed his past and start a new future.

Jesus still does this today. He can still be counted on to forgive. The book of Hebrews says, "Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever." He's the same, but we're always changed in his presence. This is good news to every "Peter" out there who believes that he or she is beyond hope or can never change or be forgiven. Hear the good news of Easter. Your past doesn't define you. You aren't doomed to die in your sins and mistakes. When we flub up, and we all do, we're forgiven. Not only that, Jesus in you, Jesus in me, in us, frees you and me to forgive others when they flub up. By God's grace, we're transformed into little Christs.

So go. Go and follow Jesus to Galilee. You can't see him now, but there you will see him. Trust these angelic directions that lead us out of the grave. You'll see him when you arrive. You can't see him if you stay here. Stretch yourself. Don't linger. Flee from your tomb. Go back to the womb. Go back to your roots, your spiritual home.

Galilee was where the disciples first followed Jesus. He was calling them back to where it all started. "Come," says the Man from Galilee, "and follow me again." Start over with me.

T.S. Eliot once wrote:

"We shall not cease from exploration,  
and the end of all our exploring  
will be to arrive where we started  
and know the place for the first time."

This is a life-long journey, that must be ever renewed, refreshed, and revisited.

Galilee 2.0 is an opportunity to learn again the meaning of discipleship. Galilee Part 2 is a chance to receive forgiveness and a new start, a place to pick up where we left off.

It's ironic that throughout Mark, Jesus tells people NOT to talk about his miracles, and they talked about him every single time. Now, they're instructed to tell others about the resurrection, and they don't.

After the angel spells it all out, we hear these surprising words:

*"... they were frightened out of their wits; and they said nothing to anyone,  
for they were afraid." (RNJB)*

Those are the last words of Mark's gospel. Mark leaves it open-ended, and I think purposely. Each succeeding generation, each new Christian, takes the baton from the angel and is beckoned to share the good news.

Will you share or stay silent? The choice is ours.

So there's no "END" to Mark because the gospel story keeps being told and retold, through us and through the church throughout the ages.

And so Immanuel, let's keep searching, keep wondering, keep following, keep running, keep sharing and trying to catch up to Jesus. Let's be ever forward-looking and forward-moving. Don't get stuck in the past. Learn from the past, but don't live in it. We're an Easter people. We're a Jesus people born anew. We've got to keep moving, keep playing catch up to what he's doing.

This isn't the end—it's the beginning once again. God is alive and at work and on the move. And Jesus says to us, "Come and follow me—again."

Amen.

Sermon Art: *"Resurrected Christ with Mary Magdalene,"* Glencairn Chapel, Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania

---

The New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved. The Revised New Jerusalem Bible, copyright © 2018, 2019 by Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd. Religious affiliation, Catholic Church.