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Easter Day – Mark 16:1-8 – Certain Hope for Uncertain Times

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Some big news came out of Russia recently that – I am happy to report – has nothing to do with politics: a Russian transhumanist and life extensionist named Alexey Turchin claims that he has figured out how to bring humans back from the dead.

He calls his program technological resurrection, and the key to making this all work is using what's called a Dyson Sphere, a superpowered artificial intelligence megastructure that surrounds the sun and harnesses its computing energy in order to collect all the historical and personal information possible about an individual. Turchin says it could then rebuild a digital copy of that person after their physical death.

But that's not all! He also says that from that point, a person would be able to live their entire life again in a simulated reality. But just like their first physical life, a person's digital life will apparently also end in death, at which point Turchin theorizes they will be sent to a simulated afterlife with all the rest of simulated humanity in that same place.

So there you have it. Cancel Easter, throw out the Bible, because humanity has come up with its own roadmap to immortality!.. Except that nothing about that plan is anything close to certain. That Dyson sphere – it's impossible for humanity to build with our limited manpower and resources. What's more, even if it could use a person's DNA, there's no possible way an artificial intelligence can record every formative event in your history and every detail that makes you who you are. And one scientist theorizing that simulated beings will one day be able to live a simulated life and afterlife isn't science; it's science *fiction*.

Yet, there is a part of me that feels for Dr. Turchin. See, when Turchin was 11 years old, a girl in his class at school died. Just like the Apostle Paul said, that really confronted him with the terrible truth that our last and greatest enemy is death – and so he devoted the rest of his life's work toward trying to achieve immortality by any means possible. And within maybe only a number of centuries, he says that goal might be realistic.

Yes, I feel sorry for Dr. Turchin, because he's looking to humanity thousands of years in the future for answers that God already gave us thousands of years in the past. We don't have to be uncertain and unsure about what's coming. We can have sure and certain hope for what's coming in this world and in our lives that's based on God's perfect promises and work. We don't need to read scholarly scientific papers; we don't need to search the cosmos; all we need to do is look to that empty garden tomb and that angel sent to tell the news that all humanity needs to hear: Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

And that's exactly what those women who went to Jesus' tomb that morning were going to find out. They had lost their dearest friend and they just wanted to show him their love one more time, so they bought enough spices to anoint Jesus' body like a king, and they got up at the crack of dawn and led their funeral procession right up to his tomb to say goodbye.

But when they got there, they didn't see Jesus. Instead they saw a young man, an angel, just sitting there where Jesus once lay – so strikingly calm and confident given the circumstances that you'd almost expect to see him legs crossed, whistling, and reading the newspaper. And for those women, what that young man said gave them certain hope for uncertain times: *“Don't be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.”* That changed everything. Don't be alarmed, he said – well, they thought they had good reason to be alarmed! See, because of our sins, we were condemned to die and condemned to hell, separated from God's grace and goodness forever and there was nothing *we* could do about it to fix it. These women were alarmed because they thought their hopes were shattered; they thought that when Jesus died, all their hope for forgiveness and eternal life and peace with God died with him.

But when that angel invited them to come and see, he revealed an empty tomb that couldn't hold Jesus in. That means Christ is risen, death is fallen, and the grave is toppled down! As fearsome as those enemies once were for us, on Easter morning when Jesus came out of his grave, all our fear and uncertainty gave way to the sweetest success, the ultimate triumph, and certain hope that will never disappoint us or fail us. The war was over, the devil and all the forces of evil have been put to flight, and victory is ours, because Christ is risen.

That angel promised those women: no longer did death have power over their Savior, and so no longer did death have power over them, either. When they finally saw their living Lord, all their uncertainty was driven away and replaced by certain hope that could never be taken from them. Jesus lives, now and forever, and that means the devil's reign of terror in this world is over. It means the age of fear and death in our lives will soon be at its end. And if you're struggling with sorrows over losing loved ones or even over the prospect of your own death someday, Jesus' resurrection means that you will live forever with him and with all of our brothers and sisters who fell asleep in faith, and you will never have to say goodbye to any of them ever again.

So when your life seems so uncertain with the pandemic, with civil and political unrest, with financial or material insecurity, with worry about all of the above and everything else along with it – your God points you to the cross and the empty tomb. Look to the Son of God who willingly died for you and then triumphantly rose for you, because this is what he promises you: no matter what the talking heads say, no matter what the news reports day in and day

out, no matter what your own doubts and uncertainties may be, Jesus' resurrection means he can overcome them for you now and forever. He rose from the dead to put all your uncertainties to rest and to give you the certain hope of forgiveness right now, his constant loving care going forward, and resurrection perfection one day to come.

People of God, you don't have to be alarmed, you don't have to be afraid or uncertain anymore, because on Good Friday Jesus said, "It is finished," and on Easter Sunday when he rose up out of his grave, God the Father said, "Amen to that!" Now no matter what doubts and fears the devil may still try to peddle in our lives – how long will COVID last and how can we avoid it? Is the vaccine really safe, and are our elections really secure? Can our country take any more division? Do our leaders really care about us? Will I be able to keep my job and pay my bills? Is my family falling apart? Could God ever put up with someone like me? – the ultimate answer to them all is found here at Jesus' empty tomb, because that angel's message still rings out even to you and to me, don't be alarmed; put your certain hope in your risen Savior and put your times in his hands! See, the whole reason Jesus went to the cross in the first place was to take away those sinful doubts and fears, to rebuild the bridge that we burnt between us, and to make things right for us with God again. Jesus shed his blood to wash you clean of your sins, to make God the Father *your* God and Father now, and to guarantee that because he lives, you also will live under God's help and protection, under God's grace and blessing, here in this life and most especially in eternal life.

Yes, Jesus' resurrection gives us certain hope for now and forever because that's his undeniable proof that our sins are forgiven, that all his promises are true and he always follows through on them for us, and that God accepted Jesus' sacrifice for us on the cross. Jesus freed us from our sins when he rose from the dead because that's how he showed beyond a shadow of a doubt that his perfect death was sufficient to redeem humanity – to buy us back from our slavery to Satan and make us God's own children again. My brothers and sisters, Christ's victory on Easter morning is our victory, because by his death and resurrection our Savior crushed the devil's head; he silenced all our doubts and fears and uncertainties forever; and he took away the terror of death by making it for us simply now the gate to eternal life and the front door we walk through to get into our heavenly home.

And even as that angel invited those women to come and see Jesus' empty tomb, at the same time he also told them to go and share this certain hope for uncertain times. The angel said, "Go, tell [Jesus'] disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"

"Tell his disciples and Peter..." Don't miss that, because those were simple words that meant the world: *Jesus still wants us, even after everything we've done. Jesus still loves us. He still*

*welcomes us as his own. We're still his people, still his followers, still heirs of his kingdom forever.* That was a message of hope and joy and forgiveness and peace that Peter may never have expected to hear after he denied Jesus those three times – but Jesus' resurrection changes everything. And my brothers and sisters, this Easter, Jesus calls your name, too, just like he did for Peter, and he holds out those same promises to you. No matter what you've done in your life, there is nothing his blood cannot cover and nothing his love cannot forgive. So leave your guilt and shame and uncertainty there in the tomb, because Jesus gives you his certain hope for a future full of forgiveness and freedom forevermore. Away with the devil's lies and doubts and fears; they mean nothing for you anymore, because your Savior is alive and victorious. That means all your sins are gone forever, you can depend on every word and promise Jesus has ever given you, and through faith in your risen Lord, you have the absolute certainty of salvation and eternal life in heaven one day. And so now when our lives may seem so uncertain in so many different ways, we find our certain hope in Jesus, because by his death and resurrection for us he overcame this sinful world and now he calls us out of it as well – not just to Galilee like he told the disciples, but to the heavenly home he's preparing for us where we will see him face-to-face and be with him forever, just as he told us.

Yes, it's kind of hard to take seriously somebody claiming that they can achieve eternal life with a solar-powered supercomputer. Even from a purely worldly perspective, the sun could one day supernova and their energy source would be gone; that digital memory could one day malfunction or get corrupted like all hard drives seem to; and anybody who's ever played a video game or watched a Disney movie knows that *simulated* reality, *virtual* reality is really no reality at all. That kind of hope is nothing but a wish, nothing but a dream, nothing but whitewashed uncertainty. No, what we have is so much better, because what Jesus did for us *is* reality, it *is* certainty, and that stands firm against doubt and fear and anything else that might ever challenge it. Even our more realistic uncertainties – about your health or your wealth, or a virus or a vaccine, or your job or your relationships – Jesus has put them all to rest because his resurrection gives us the certain hope that he lives to love us and lead us and never let us down right now and one day he will surely raise us to eternal life with him in perfect Paradise, no matter what happens to us or around us until we get there. Yes, on Easter morning, that angel sat next to Jesus' empty tomb and proclaimed for all the world to hear: sin, death, and the devil have fallen and heaven for you now stands open, because – let's say it together – Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia! Amen.