

Matthew 28:1-10

Easter Sunday, April 16, 2017

Matthew 28:1-10 (NRSV)

¹After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ²And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. ⁵But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." ⁸So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

In a lot of ways Easter seems like a conclusion. Each year the church embarks on 40 days of Lent starting with Ash Wednesday and then drawing to a close during Holy Week with Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and culminating this morning with Easter Sunday. At times the season of Lent might move a bit too slow for our taste. The season lends itself to a time of reflection and inward thinking as we meander toward the cross of Good Friday. Even the hymns we sing, at times a bit more somber and slow than we might like, mirror these Lenten

themes. And thus we long for the conclusion. For Easter morning. For songs of praise and thanks. For a bit more zip in our step. Yes, at times we may think of Easter as a conclusion of Lent; however, Easter is all about beginnings. It is all about life. It is all about what God has done and is continuing to do. Easter matters this morning. It matters tomorrow. It matters next week, next month, and next year. It matters each and every second, minute, and hour of the day.

We really are not told why the 2 Mary's come to Jesus' tomb this morning. All Matthew states is they went to see the tomb. More than likely, they went to pay their respects. Perhaps, to shed some tears. Maybe to place some flowers outside the tomb or maybe just to sit and remember the time they had with Jesus. Yet, something shocking happens. The earth quakes. An angel descends. A sure and certain sign of God's presence. Something that leaves them trembling in fear and awe. We can be fairly certain that what happened that first day of the week was like anything they expected to find. Even the guards watching the tomb were shaken to their very core so much their fear immobilized them. The first words of the angel to the women, "Do not be afraid."

I suspect each of us come today with some fears, anxieties, or worries. As another missile is launched by a very unpredictable dictator we might come in fear of what happens if one is finally able to reach its intended target. We might

live in fear of mounting political tensions around the globe and diminishing relationships among nations. Or maybe we come today trembling because something is just not right physically with our bodies or someone near and dear to us. Our bones ache. A loved one's memory has been fading and we worry that something much worse is happening. A surgery is on the horizon that grips us. Our fingers or toes have recently started to twinge and even become numb and we lay awake shaking of what is causing this. Or maybe it's mounting debt we have occurred. How will we ever get out from under it? Or fear of paying for college or unplanned medical expenses. Maybe it's the fear of a test this coming week. The bottom line is we each come this morning, as did the women, with things that cause us to tremble. Maybe even our world has recently been shook by news we are struggling to comprehend and come to terms with. Or perhaps its life in the church. Attendance numbers have declined recently. Giving is slightly down. Fear sets in about the future.

How does the Easter news apply? Why does resurrection matter now?

While I would love to stand here today and promise you that when you leave all those fears will be gone. All the pains we come with will disappear. All our problems resolved I know that would be a lie. However, I can in the midst of our fear we can experience joy. In the midst of our pain we can experience healing.

In the midst of our anger we can experience happiness. Because the resurrected Christ meets us. Because God is alive and active. Because transformation is a reality. Because new life happens around us all the time. Resurrection joy is all around us but sometimes we just need to open our eyes. In the midst of our fear there are beautiful blossoms of joy. Signs of hope. Because of the wonderful news of that Christ is alive. Notice what Matthew tells us after the angel directed the women to go to Galilee and proclaim this miracle to the disciples. They left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy.

So where do we see this? I was out visiting with one of our shut-ins recently and we were sharing stories about our aches and pains and possibly even some our fears. Her bones were aching and just not able to do the things they once were. I had been having some troubles swallowing from my recent neck surgery, a common side effect. Yet, then the conversation shifted as she shared a story that made both of laugh, smile and experience some of that Easter joy. Or as a family is gripped by the death of a loved one but into the midst of that springs up memories that had faded away years ago. New life as family and friends reconnect after years of not seeing each other. Nuggets of joy as boxes stored for years are unpacked that bring smiles and laughter. Or how about this story I saw some time ago on the news. An elderly man's wife had died and for all

practical purposes his desire to live. His world had been shaken. Fear about tomorrow and the next day and the future without his spouse that had been near his side for so many years grasped ahold of him. What next? How does one move forward? Depressed, downtrodden, and hopeless one day he is out getting some groceries when suddenly a mother and her young daughter approach. The young daughter immediately notices the pain in the man's eyes and the scowl on his face that has been there since his wife's death. The young girl, as children have a way of doing, asks a pointed question many of us adults are fearful to ask, "Why are you not smiling?" The man, caught off guard, didn't really know how to respond. The mother describes this as her daughter was intent on making this stranger smile. She zoned in on this single man when there were plenty of others around. She asked if she could hug the man, which her mother allowed and the man did too. She put a smile on this man's face and this sparked the beginning of a wonderful relationship which continues to this day. The man calls her an "angel". God's presence with him. Easter joy in the midst of heartache and pain. New life in the midst of death.

Easter matters. Today. Tomorrow. Through our proclamation of this message the Spirit was a way to come into the midst of the fears we harbor and bring us joy and joy to those we encounter. Joy that springs forth hope. Joy that

births love, hope, new life, and assures us death will never have the final say.

Christ is alive. Alleluia!