

## **Easter Sunday April 12, 2020**

### **Gospel: Matthew 28:1-10**

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary come to the tomb to check on the work of death, to witness, to see. Just as they have done all along. The Mary's were there with the other women when Jesus cried his last on Good Friday. They saw them place Jesus into the tomb and roll the stone to seal him in. They go now, according to Matthew, to see the tomb, following a Jewish custom...to sit across from it in witness to the dead. Sure, from their earlier experience that Jesus is there.

But he's not. For God has opened the tomb, has reached into the grave and resurrected Jesus. Not revived, not resuscitated but made him alive again, who once was dead. For Resurrection is only the purview of God. The one who molded Adam from the dirt of the earth and breathed God's own ruach, God's own breath/Spirit into his nostrils and created- life. Human life.

The angel speaks to the women. To these followers and supporters of Jesus. These women who were the only faithful to witness firsthand Christ's death on the cross, to see him taken down and entombed. To bear witness to what seemed like the victory of death and human sinfulness.

This angel speaks, seated on that stone meant to keep Jesus in, now moved- "Do not be afraid! I know who you're looking for. But he is not here! He has been raised and is out there! Moving, travelling, working. A little thing like death can't keep him down! You better go tell the disciples so you can hurry and catch up with him!"

And these women, who had come to bear witness to the victory of death and encountered the surprise of Life... they go- quickly, filled with a mixture of fear and joy, running flat out- as fast as their feet will take them. And as they go, behold, Jesus met them. I imagine them so filled with fear and joy, so hurried that they almost bowl Jesus over. They literally run smack dab into him.

"Greetings!"- the root of the word Jesus uses is Rejoice! And in the greeting and in the seeing the Mary's recognize Jesus, come to him on their knees and grab his feet worshipping him. Cling to him in relief, disbelief, joy, amazement at the power and love of God he embodies. But Jesus reminds them, "Don't be afraid- go and tell. Go and tell the disciples that I am raised. Go and tell that the hold of death over humanity has been broken. Go and tell that the Messiah lives. Go and tell!"

And this is the Good News today that we as believers in Jesus Christ claim. Cling to. Even in the midst of pandemic. Even in the midst of grief still fresh. Even in the midst of worry and uncertainty. This is why even now we can proclaim, Alleluia, Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed, Alleluia!

Because Christ is not in the tomb. But out there. Waiting for us to bump into him. To almost bowl him over as we move about our lives in joy and fear. As we move to go and tell everyone, that Jesus is raised from the dead.

This is the Good News. The Resurrection of Jesus is God's final answer to death, to sin, to hate, to fear. It may be a bit crass, but on this Easter, in this moment, in my life and yours, I would best describe the resurrection of Jesus as God's middle finger to death.

And this is the Good News, because on this day we can raise our voices together and say to death, "In the name of Jesus Christ we tell you to "Step off". You no longer have ultimate power over us. We will no longer cower in fear because of you. We will no longer let fear of you control our lives. In Christ we stand up to you. In Christ we will love our neighbor, and our enemy, and our God. We will defy you. I defy you."

And this is our hope. Today and every day. Even as we go to our computers, look at the numbers, and check in on the work of death.

Unlike how it is sometimes presented and practiced, our Christian faith is not some pie in the sky by and by. It is not God as some banker in the heavens giving wealth to all who just pray enough or think positively enough. It is not the promise of never experiencing grief, fear, failure, death. No, the faith I proclaim to you. The one I live in is much more powerful than that. Because it is one that gets down into the reality and muck, and messiness of life. It is in touch with our fears, and our failures, and our sin. This faith that I proclaim crawls into the grave- and resurrects people.

Because God in Jesus has been there. God in Jesus is there. In grief over a loved one dead. In pain as death comes near. In sorrow at rejection and betrayal. In the depths of our self-loathing, of our weakness. Christ is there. The Christ I follow, the faith I claim is one that is for us at all times. In our deepest fears. In our deepest sorrows. In our moments of despair, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me!"

The faith I proclaim is one that the very creation bears witness to. Look around you. Even today. Even in the midst of cold,

rain, snow... Flowers are blooming. New life is coming. The very creation bears witness to the power of God. That only God can bring life out of death. That only God can resurrect.

This is the faith that I believe and proclaim and trust. That nothing- neither height, nor depth, nor things past, nor things to come, not even death can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ because Jesus has already been there. And back again. That in Jesus God has defeated sin and death. And that is our hope! That is our salvation!

We are not gathered together this morning. Not in person. But that's okay. Jesus is not here! He is out there! In your homes. In the hospitals. In the caring hands that feed and soothe. In the breath that gives you peace. In the laughter of your children. In the hope and promise of tomorrow. In all those who embody the love of God for us.

It doesn't feel like Easter, but it is. Because Easter is not us assembled. Easter is not egg hunts, pastel colors, bonnets and sweets. I love them all, I'm waiting on my jelly beans. But that ain't Easter. And if it was, oh how fragile it would be. But our God is anything but fragile.

Easter is an empty tomb. Easter is grief turned to joy. Easter is laughter through tears. Easter is joy everlasting. Easter is hope. For all of us. In any situation. And at any time.

Even now. Even physically apart from each other for the sake of each other. Even in the face of an uncertain future. In the risen Christ we have hope. In the risen Christ, we know the love of God for us. A love beyond all understanding. A love that goes beyond even death. A love that once it lays hold of you will never let you go.

The best gospel I have to proclaim to you today is the one told by the angel. As a friend of mine imagines, Just sitting on the stone just a-swingin' his legs. Pleased as punch to say to the women, "Do not be afraid! Do not be captive to fear. Because- Jesus is not bound in the tomb, but free. He's out there. So, let us rejoice. Today. In our freedom from sin and death. And then let us go. For Jesus is not here, but always out there. Always on the move. That's where you will see me- Jesus says. When you bump into me in both your fear and your joy.

This is the Good News- Alleluia, Christ is Risen. He is Risen Indeed, Alleluia.