

# Sermon Text for April 12, 2020 – EASTER SUNDAY

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Jeremiah 31:1-6, Matthew 28:1-10  
*“Up from the grave he arose”*

Happy Easter! He is Risen! He is Risen indeed! I hope you have a chance to shout it out loud today in the face of all that we are going through. It ought to serve as our battle cry. As we face the reality of today, one that none of us have ever face before, we can still say with confidence, with conviction, and with joy: He is Risen, He is Risen Indeed! Today, Easter 2020 is one that you will never forget in your life. I don't care how old you are, you will always remember the year that we had Easter at home. Not the year they cancelled Easter, as if we could cancel Easter, no one can cancel Easter, it already happened, it is a true historical, life altering event. We don't have the ability to cancel it. But it is different this year.

What are some of you most vivid memories of Easter? Go ahead and write them in the chat. The four Bronkema boys always had a chance to wear a suit for their only time of the year. By the time the suit got to Bronkema number 4, it was pretty threadbare, but I got a chance to wear it once I year. I remember the Easter I had that suit on, had my pockets in my pants, was walking into the church, tripped, couldn't get my hands out of my pocket in time and went crashing to the ground face first. Yeah, that was a good memory, I walked into that church stunned and with a bloody lip and chin.

Every Easter as a kid my dad would read the Easter story around the lunch table in Matthew, the same one we will read today, and when it came to the part of the earthquake all the boys would shake the table with all they had. Mom learned to put the food on the table after the earthquake. Easter memories are rich and unique and significant, and this year, we will all remember together the same year. So welcome to the second most memorable Easter Sunday we have had, next to the original one.

We are pretty subdued this year compared to most years. We are low tech here, but the message doesn't change or get lost in the bells and whistles this year. I don't want anyone to miss the message this year that is such an integral part of our experience this year. The message that Jesus rose from the grave to give us eternal life so that we might rise with him one day.

As you are at home today, hunkered down, we can't lose sight of the fact that Easter is ultimately a story of victory against all odds. We weren't able to worship together this past week to the lead up to the resurrection. We missed the liturgy and the symbolism of Maundy Thursday as we would gather around the table and remember the last Supper that Jesus had with his

disciples. A supper that set the stage for the next day that would come, and for the betrayal of Jesus.

We missed Good Friday which leaves us with a crucified Christ, on the cross and then in a grave. You can't really go from Palm Sunday to Easter without any of the betrayal, the passion, the darkness that surrounds the last hours of our Savior's life. But didn't we just say last week that we are currently living in a time of passion so it doesn't take a whole lot of imagination to consider the suffering of Jesus. So as we live in this passion, How are you? How have you been this past week?

Last week we took communion because we needed a reminder that God has won the war even if the battle in which we find ourselves seems to be getting the best of us. This week we celebrate Easter for the same reason. Jesus rose from the grave so that we could have eternal life. So that we could be considered his disciples and live lives that reflect his calling. Let's read about this resurrection that defines our relationship to our Savior.

### **READ SCRIPTURE**

They say the Monday after Easter all of the cardinals in Rome gather in the Sistine chapel and tell jokes and laugh and celebrate. Easter, after all, is our ability to laugh in the face of death because it does not have the final word. While we may today be living in a time of uncertainty, today, at least just today, we stand in confidence knowing that God has the victory over all that is happening in our lives and in our world. Our first Scripture, Jeremiah, speaks of a future time when in vs.4 the people will be built up and God will do the building up. Jeremiah speaks of a time when restoration will take place, because the current reality of the people of Israel was quite dire and bleak.

In vs.2 we read that when the Lord appears our future dramatically changes. The people of Israel needed to hear that. He is a prophet, speaking God's word, to the people when the people of Israel are taken from their home land and into slavery and captivity in Babylon, so the destruction, the death, the slavery, the passion of the people of Israel was at an all time high. I cannot compare what we are going through now with what the people of Israel went through in Jeremiah's day. But the sense of passion remains a common denominator between the two.

But there is also a promise from God in Jeremiah that he will be God for all the people of Israel. For all the people of faith. This is Jeremiah's promise to the people in exile. We will rise up from the grave. We will replant, we will gather again, we will worship in the temple once again. Do you hear it people of God? You have been through a lot, Jeremiah states, but you survived the sword in the wilderness, you made it through this time of wilderness, and through

all this God reached out with an everlasting love which would not quite. You made it through all of this and I will build you and you shall be built.

I will build you and you shall be built. Does anyone out there relate to that today? If you do, just say out loud: He is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Because that statement flies in the face of the reality in which we find ourselves. When we say that on Easter Sunday it is a cry of faith built around a recognition that the current captivity in which we find ourselves will end, and when it does end that we will be rejoice because the empty grave is a sign that God is at work.

When we get to Matthew we find an empty grave and we think of that rousing Easter Song which I love to sing every Easter: Up from the grave he arose. Can you hear it? I can, it is ringing in my ears in a beautiful melody. My dad one Easter when he was at the first position he had after seminary was given the task of opening up Easter Sunday after the He is Risen. He was to say with conviction: Make a joyful noise to the Lord! And the people were supposed to respond: Alleluia. He was so nervous, so he got up there and with conviction said: Make a noyful joise to the Lord! He never heard the Alleluia.

The Matthew account of the resurrection is my favorite because of the family ties that I have to it the earthquake that took place every year around the Bronkema table. According to Matthew things happened a little differently than in some of the other Gospels. We have the scene open early on the day after the Sabbath, which clearly is a Sunday morning for us, which is why we worship on Sunday by the way. Two women, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. We assume the other Mary is Jesus' mother. An angel arrives and rolls the stone away with a major earthquake. There is a guard there at the tomb and the guard is paralyzed by both the angel and the earthquake.

Two times the women are told not to be afraid. Once by this angel and then a second time as the Angel tells them to be the first witnesses to the resurrection. These women become the first evangelists with the good news of the resurrection to tell others. On their way to telling others they see Jesus, they worship Jesus. He tells them to Rejoice. Our translations has "Greetings". The literal Greek is Rejoice! I like that better. They see Jesus, they worship him, not wanting to let him go. Up from the grave Jesus arose, and as a result we worship him today.

This story is credible because God is credible. You know, some people think that we have to prove to others that the resurrection of Jesus is real. But the empty grave is not proof of the resurrection, but it is a sign. It is not our task to prove the resurrection but it is our task to disseminate the message. The women didn't have to prove the resurrection to anyone, they believed it.

It simply comes down to the fact that this is a faith story. We should not feel the need to defend it, Jesus doesn't need our defense, but he does need us to share the story. This is our primary task, not to prove it, but to tell it. Jesus rose from the grave and his resurrection gave us eternal life. He conquered our sin. Our sin separates us from God. Jesus, in his resurrection, unites us to God.

I can't encourage you enough to not miss the meaning behind Easter this year. It is so easy for us to take Easter for granted, to just go through the motions, but it is harder to do that this year. Our Easter is completely different this year. Easter was meant for believers. The question should be: What is this story telling us about God? Easter is God's comment on Good Friday. While the cross seems to annul Jesus as King, the resurrection, the empty grave, confirms it. It is dangerous to see Easter as automatic. For Matthew, Easter is not our act, but God's act. And this Easter when our traditional, automatic responses to Easter are no longer available, we are reminded of how God is in control even from the grave.

Jesus tells the women: Rejoice! I don't want to seem tone deaf to what is happening around us, but I am telling you this is the time that we must Rejoice. The shepherds were told by the angels at the birth of Jesus: Rejoice. I am bringing you good news of great joy.

This Easter Sunday we find ourselves in a place where we realize that the empty tomb deserves an explanation. Justin Martyr 100 years after the resurrection wrote about the rumor that is seen in vs.11 and following that the disciples of Jesus took his body. This Easter our story of faith is one which centers around the resurrection of Jesus, that he rose up from the grave.

As Paul states in I Corinthians 15:14 – "If Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith is in vain." Hear the Easter message. Jesus rose from the dead to save us from our sins and also from our fears. Perfect love, the love that Jesus has for us, casts out all fear.

I have some homework for you this Easter. First, I want you to ask the question if you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Do you know that you are a sinner and that you need a redeemer? Do you know that Jesus loves you so much that even while you were yet a sinner, he died for you. If you know that you are sinner, do you know that you have a Savior, a personal Savior who knows you intimately and still loves you? This Jesus in his resurrection has given you eternal life, you do not have to fear death any longer, you do not have to be separated from God any longer. God has claimed you in Jesus Christ as your child if you would only bring him into your life and accept him as Lord and Savior.

I would love for you to also emulate the women in this story. They believed in God, they worshipped Jesus, and they went out into the world and told others about Jesus. Won't you do the same? Won't you go out into the world and proclaim Jesus. Here is my challenge for you. Send this link to 5 people that you know don't go to church anywhere and encourage them to follow along on Sunday morning. Tell them you are giving them this link because you love them, and because God loves them as well. Amen.