

Sermon Text for March 31, 2024 – Easter Sunday

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Isaiah 25:6-9 and Matthew 28:1-10 *“The feast of Easter”*

Welcome to Easter 2024! If you haven't been here in a while, it is so great to see you and it is so great to see all of us gathered together to celebrate the single most important aspect of our faith, the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. There is nothing more important about our relationship with Jesus than the fact that he is resurrected and so we will be resurrected with him into eternal life. This is the 192nd celebration of Easter in this church, so just by being here you are a part of something historic.

Easter is one of those moments in our life with Christ that we experience on a yearly basis. It is as close to a high holy day as Presbyterians have. Similar to Christmas as a believer in Jesus Christ you just simply need to show up at these services in our cultural understanding of what it means to be a Christian. As a result we can take for granted the meaning behind Easter, we can miss what Easter is all about.

What we are doing here is trying to make sure that every time that we meet together to worship God we understand the meaning behind the experience. Every time that we gather we open ourselves to, as Paul states, to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. So today I want you to hear and believe the image that Isaiah gives us and that is that our relationship with God, our personal and communal walk as disciples and followers of Jesus is a feast, today we celebrate the feast of Easter.

I know that I've told this story many times before, but as four boys we always looked forward to Easter because we did have a feast. We all loved ham, and we always had a big ham lunch after church with mashed potatoes and with rice, and all sorts of awesome vegetables like brussel sprouts. But before we could dig in, my dad would always read this Scripture that we are about to read, the resurrection according to Matthew. Before we could enjoy the feast we had to hear about the resurrection. And when the part in Matthew got to where it says: and there was a great earthquake, we shook the table for all it was worth. Great memories for us as boys, maybe not so much for my mom.

Scripture is filled with examples of people of faith around a table at a feast. Joseph reveals himself to his brothers around a meal table, Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper around a meal, he reveals himself to his disciples after the resurrection around a meal. This Easter feast that we celebrate today is supposed to last a lifetime. Because the resurrection that we celebrate

today changes everything. It absolutely changes everything. In the resurrection of Jesus all things remain new, nothing remains the same. No one should leave here this Sunday morning unscathed. Let's read.

READ

When we talk about the feast of Easter we have to look at a description of a feast that is given to us by Isaiah. Let's look at our first reading for this morning. The prophet Isaiah describes clearly a feast that leads to life. Let's look at this reading again, this feast that he describes will be filled with rich food, marrow, the best of the best food and wine. But it won't just be something that feeds us physically, this feast, this relationship with God will remove the shroud that is cast over us.

Anyone come to church today feeling like they have a shroud cast over them? Anyone here today with a heaviness of heart for whatever reason? The lives that we live are not easy, there is so much that works against any of us having a joy that is lasting. Well, the prophet tells us that our relationship with God will remove the shroud that is over us, when we join the feast that God provides us, look at vs.8, he will swallow up death forever.

This is the resurrection. Paul has something to say about swallowing up death forever. Look at I Corinthians 15:54-55. This is the Easter feast, death no longer has its hold on us. We are given the promise and the assurance that the resurrection is not just for Jesus but for us also. This is the main course of the Easter feast, we are able to die and to be raised from the dead with our Savior Jesus Christ. This should be good news for all of us, but especially if we find ourselves in church today with a bit of a shroud that is over us.

Isaiah gives us a picture of a complete celebration, not a partial one. He tells us that God's desire for us and for our life is to wipe away the tears from our eyes so that we can be with him completely. A feast and a celebration is what God desires for our lives. And ultimately, today, this is what we celebrate in Jesus and his resurrection. We don't have to wait for judgment day for the resurrection, because it is happening now, this is why we are gathered. As a result, the kingdom of God is among us, now! Let's celebrate!

Let's look at the actual resurrection story in Matthew. If this is your first time in a long time to be with us on Sunday, the person sitting next to you knows Matthew really well. We've been in it for nearly two years now, and we continue to work our way through it. Speaking of Scripture, we did it folks, we did it! Thank you to all who read through those 78 hours straight. Bill Potter started us off on Tuesday morning at 6am and Linda Lawrence gently closed the Bible

after reading Revelation on Friday at 12:18pm. We made it through. I pray that God's Word remains important to you on your faith journey.

What Matthew gives us is clearly a faith story. That is true of the resurrection in general, isn't it? If you don't know Jesus and you don't believe in the resurrection, our purpose here today is not to try to convince you that it is true. We either believe it or we don't, and as a result of our belief in the resurrection we ask the question, what does the resurrection tell us about God?

We aren't here to try to convince anyone of anything, because it is a matter of faith and matters of faith is where the Holy Spirit works to reveal the presence of God. What we are here to do is to gather around the feast and celebrate this resurrection that is a fundamental and building block, and cornerstone of our faith. The resurrection is God's answer to Good Friday, what a powerful service that was, and it was great to have the church pretty full on that evening as well. This story of the resurrection is credible only because God is credible, not because we are able to convince.

So let's look at the story of the resurrection in Matthew. We begin with the women who are described as Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. We see these same women earlier in Matthew in chapter 27:55-56 where we find described the Mary whose sons were James and Joseph. Which Mary in the Bible had sons named James and Joseph? Look at Matthew 12:48-50. So this is Mary, Jesus' mother, whom we know is at the cross and whom John is given custody over. So these two Marys according to Matthew are Mary Magdalene and Jesus' mom, Mary.

We see the earthquake take place which also happens in chapter 27 when Jesus is crucified, in 27:51 which splits the earth and opens tombs. The guards at the tomb also shook, the Greek word for all of this is seismos, so a whole lot of shaking going on in the resurrection here. The angel is described as the one who physically rolls the stone away from the grave, and he interacts with the women and tells them to go and tell the disciples that Jesus is Risen! He is Risen indeed! The angel begins his conversation with the women with the phrase that we have seen many, many times: Do not be afraid.

Remember that shroud we talked about that has been lifted. When that shroud is upon us it is because of fear. Think of how much of an impact fear has upon your life. I have told you over and over again that fear cannot be the deciding factor in any of our decisions in our personal lives, or in the life of this church. But it continues to reveal itself and have an impact upon us, that shroud sometimes is really hard to lift. So the women are told to go quickly and so Scripture

states that they start running. Can you see Jesus' mom running to tell the disciples, or Mary Magdalene? They weren't taking a stroll back, they were running.

Scripture also says that as they are running they have two companions with them. Fear and joy. At the feast of Easter fear and joy are our constant companions. But why fear? Because all things are new with Jesus when we give our lives to him, and when all things are new we don't know what that is going to look like. When all things are new in Jesus we don't have any control, only the Holy Spirit does, and that can be scary, but it is also exhilarating as well. Fear and Joy followed the women from the tomb because they realized that Jesus was alive.

That is when suddenly, the Scripture says, Jesus appears to them. Suddenly, out of the blue. As a result they do that which the wise men do when they see Jesus at his birth, they kneel and bow down and worship him. The women grab his feet in an act of complete worship. Jesus tells them, like the angel, do not fear, again, don't allow fear to get in the way of the Feast of Easter which transform you by the renewing of your minds. If you are not transformed by the presence of Jesus then more likely than not it is fear getting in the way.

In fact, before he says that to the women, how does he greet them? Greetings! Greetings? No, no, the Greek is *chairete* which means Rejoice!!! This is the joy that the women had. This is the joy that Paul requires of us in Philippians 4:4 – Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say rejoice. What does our first Scripture reading say in vs.9, let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation. While fear may be present, joy has to prevail. It is the only way to shake off the shroud, it is to rejoice in the new life that we have in Jesus because of the resurrection.

As you head home today I want you to ask yourself the question if your life with Christ is a feast filled with joy? We know that we have the victory in Jesus and that victory is over death and sin, we know that the shroud is torn off and that we can rejoice as a result, but are we living it? I pray that you will find yourself daily living the feast of Easter. Amen.