

Sermon Text for April 20, 2025 – Easter Sunday

Psalm 150, Matthew 28:1-10 *“The Day of Resurrection”*

Welcome to the single most important day of celebration in the entire year in the life of the church and for us as people of faith. Psalm 150 really sets the stage for us as we praise the Lord for the resurrection. We are called to praise God in all seasons of life, in all times that we find ourselves, in all of life's situations and even in the most difficult of times to the times of joy that we experience. When we are overcome with joy for new life or overcome with grief for the death of a loved one, we are called to praise the Lord.

I chose to sit down and work through this after the Good Friday service. I have never one that before because after Good Friday I'm somewhat emotionally spent. We have just spent an hour reading through Scripture that just points to the inexorable death of our Savior. Good Friday was still ringing in my ears when I heard about the women approaching the tomb and something really, really special happens that changes the course of history and changes the relationship that we have with our creator God forever. Let's read that story together.

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One of the most powerful images I have as a child, probably one of my first memories, was when my family lived in Portugal and as a missionary kid we lived on this hillside at an ecumenical center. We would make our way from where we lived to the cafeteria, and some early mornings it was barely light out, the fog could get so thick that you could not see a single thing in front of you. You could hear the chickens rustling and the pigs making a racket, you could smell them as well, but I could not see a thing. But my father would take my hand, and I couldn't always see him because the fog was so thick, but he would lead me through the valley to the cafeteria, and I was safe.

The women on the way to the tomb may not have had a clear guiding hand leading them to the tomb. It was early, just around dawn, the dew was still on the grass, it was Sunday morning, a regular work day. It was the same day, day 1 of creation, when God created the heavens and the earth, and the world in that region was waking from its Sabbath slumber.

We worship together on Sunday because that is the day of resurrection for us. Not on a Saturday which was the Sabbath day, the OG of the day of rest. The two Marys make their way to the tomb, and they knew right where it was because they had been there on Good Friday and seen where they laid the body of Jesus. As they make their way and earthquake rocks the land, it could have been an aftershock of the earthquake that had struck when Jesus had died also on

Good Friday as we read in chapter 27. But by now the women were probably terrified, it is still half dark, there could have been the same fog that we often see in that area, and an earthquake takes place.

To make matters worse, or better, depending on your perspective, when they get to the place where Jesus was buried the stone which was covering the grave was rolled away and an angel in bright clothes was sitting on it as if he had just completed a great task. The life of Jesus is bookmarked by angels that give messages to those who are about to experience him fully, Joseph at his birth and now at his resurrection the two Marys.

We read earlier that after Jesus had died and after he had been buried guards had been posted outside of his tomb just in case any of his disciples had gotten any big ideas and tried to steal the body. In fact, in the 2nd century we read from Justin Martyr that this story was out there that Jesus' body had been stolen, our youth will tell us more about that next week. But these guards are mentioned this week and they are shaking, just like the earthquake, and they are scared to death, no really, scared to death. Ironically those charged with watching over the dead man become like dead men while the dead man, Jesus, over whom they were to watch, was no place to be found.

The angel, in fact, engages the women and tells them not to be afraid, as those guards obviously are, and that he knows that they came looking for the crucified Jesus but he is not here, and if you don't believe me, you can look in the tomb. They don't take him up on it, but they do leave quickly to go and tell his disciples what they had just seen.

I am going to take a wild guess and say that just about all of us would say that we are believers in Jesus Christ. The day of resurrection, the Easter story, is a story primarily for believers. We are encouraged and strengthened in our faith journey when hear and believe in the resurrection. The empty tomb was never proof of the resurrection of Jesus. The empty tomb is a sign for believers, because it would be folly to try to prove the resurrection to an unbeliever. The resurrection is a matter of faith for the believer which strengthens our relationship with Jesus. Even those of faith, the women as they made their way to the tomb, had to be shown the significance of the empty tomb.

Today we are coming to the tomb on Easter with some faith and leaving hopefully with a faith that will last a lifetime. The Bible tells us that they left the tomb, as we would have, with fear and with great joy. Have you ever wondered what that would look like in your life experience both fear and great joy over an event or over a period of time in your life? We have a whole swath of boys who are turning or have just turned 16 and are sophomores in high school.

Fear and great joy. All of them are in the process of getting their licenses. Fear and great joy. Jackson, Gavin, Cameron, Cole, Lex, Landon, Evan, and others that I haven't mentioned, are on the brink, or have crossed into that brink, where their parents prayer life has potentially gone from zero to a thousand.

The fear of them on the road can only be matched with the great joy that they are now able to take themselves and their siblings to school, and to events, and somehow you just found another dozen free hours a day because you are no longer the family uber driver. Maybe the fear of those within this church who are expecting, we have a few, for some of you it is a first, for others more than that, but there is always fear, but the joy that comes from this new life is so much greater, almost as if the fear does not exist. I could go on but fear and great joy is part and parcel of our relationship with our Savior, and it is seen especially in the resurrection. The fear of death is real, but the joy of the resurrection is, well realer.

The empty tomb is the necessary presupposition for Christian belief in Jesus' resurrection. It doesn't prove it, for it is a sign for faith, not proof. The angel doesn't open the tomb so that Jesus has a way out, Jesus was already resurrected and out, had already descended into hell, Jesus was already resurrected, no stone could keep him in. The stone was rolled away so that we could see that He is Risen, He is Risen indeed! The angel wasn't there to help Jesus, but rather to provide understanding to the women and to us as we journey in our faith.

We find ourselves in a season of resurrection in our church. I mentioned this a number of weeks ago, but people continue to go see Jesus within our community. I hope we are able to see the importance of the resurrection and how this Easter message that the women are entrusted with is central to our faith. Paul states in I Corinthians 15:14 that If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and our faith is in vain. Here is something that is to provide us with hope and comfort. When a person is resurrected in Jesus, like so many of our brothers and sisters are these days, they will never die again, their resurrection is eternal.

This week I received a text message from someone who was trying to understand better the death of a loved one. Someone had sent them some beautiful words that were entitled: We do not die. It was a poem that talked about how we are not actually dead but rather we are present in the wind, in nature, in all sorts of things. Brothers and sisters in Christ, we will all die. There is no nice way to say it. We will die, and recently it has been proven even more clearly that the day of our death is completely unpredictable.

The day of resurrection reminds us more than anything else that we need to have a personal relationship with Jesus otherwise this resurrection that is the keystone of our faith will

have no bearing on your life in the future. While the fact that we do die can be seen as a scandal to our faith, the resurrection is the answer to that scandal. But that resurrection only comes about when we are able to recognize the love that God has for us in Jesus.

Later in this Scripture after the women leave the empty tomb they actually do see the proof that Jesus is resurrected. They actually see Jesus himself who is the only proof that we have of his resurrection. They do that which we are called to do as we encounter Jesus in our own lives, as we gather on the first day of the week. They worship him. You see the resurrection asks a very important question of us. We may define ourselves as Christians, as believers in Jesus, but do we have a view of reality that is compatible with the proclamation of the Bible. What I mean is do we have a view of reality that is open to the possibility of supernatural events, including the resurrection.

You see, that is what forms and shapes faith. If we don't believe that God can, then the day of resurrection means nothing to us. Do we believe that God can in our own lives? Can what Bob? Yes, do we believe that God can do all things in our lives? We may have come to church this resurrection Sunday, this Easter Sunday looking for the crucified Jesus just like the women did. They weren't looking for the resurrected Jesus, they were looking for the crucified Jesus.

Instead, they found the resurrected Jesus, the one who gives us life, who meets us on the road and fill us with joy, the one who sends us to love God and our neighbor. The fear of the women here in Matthew does not reduce them to silence but rather their accompanying great joy leads them to tell the disciples what they have seen. Our task, as we live out our own lives trusting in the resurrection, is to do the same. Amen.