

This Sunday's texts:

Acts 10:34-43

Colossians 3:1-4

Matthew 28:1-10

Resurrection Realized

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The Holy Gospel for this Easter Sunday comes to us from Matthew, the 28th chapter:

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; He has risen, just as He said. Come and see the place where He lay. Then go quickly and tell His disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see Him.' Now I have told you." So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell the disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," He said. They came to Him, clasped His feet and worshiped Him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see Me."

The gospel of the Lord. Let us pray. Lord, we have come to celebrate the Resurrection. We thank You for the sacrifice that Jesus made for us on the cross and we thank You for the new life that is promised in the Resurrection. Bless us as we worship this day. Amen.

So I was paying attention on Friday night when we gathered to worship on Good Friday. As we were reading those lessons, I discovered in that very last reading that when Jesus died, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a secret follower of Jesus, came and asked for the body. Nicodemus, who came to Jesus at night and started as a secret disciple, came with Arimathea. Then there were these words in that Gospel account. It says Nicodemus brought *75 pounds* of spices.¹ That's a lot of spices! It said that he did this in order to fulfill the Jewish ceremony for how you would bury a body.² So they buried Jesus' body with those 75 pounds of spices and they rolled the stone in front of the tomb.

¹ John 19:39

² John 19:40b

That's not the surprising part. The surprising part is what was going on the next morning. Why did the women rise early in the morning - by the way, earlier than we were gathered next door (for sunrise service), while it was still dark? Why did they make their way to the tomb? What were they expecting to do? The body had already been prepared appropriately for burial and, in fact, had already been buried. The stone that they put in front of the tomb was way too heavy for them to even have a hope of being able to move it. The truth of the matter is even if they had convinced the Roman soldiers that were standing guard at the tomb to remove the stone, they couldn't have done it. It was just too heavy. So what was the purpose of them coming?

Well, I'm not sure what *their* purpose was, but I think I have a pretty good idea of what God's purpose was. Because when they get to the tomb, an angel of the Lord comes down from heaven with an earthquake and rolls the stone away. While, by the way, the other disciples, the men are hiding away in the upper room because they're afraid of the Roman soldiers. They're afraid that what they had just done to Jesus, they would also do to the followers of Jesus. The women had no such fear. So when this angel shows up and this earthquake happens, the Roman soldiers are like dead men and the women are just listening. They're told to come and see, look in the tomb, see that it's empty, and then go and tell His disciples.

So with fear and joy, they leave and what happens? Jesus shows up. They've already been given the message from the angel. "Angel," by the way, means "messenger of God." The messenger of God tells them what to do and Jesus shows up. What does he say? Don't be afraid. Go and tell the disciples.

These women become the first witnesses to the resurrection and, of course, they go and tell the disciples - I've seen the Lord. The story of Easter begins to unfold.

Christ is risen! Oh wait, Joe, you blew it! I just heard you say "has." We don't say "Christ *has* risen indeed!" Do we? Christ *is* risen! He *is* risen indeed! We're not talking just about something that happened 2000 years ago. We're talking about the resurrection promise that is alive and well this very day. Christ *is* risen, not He was.

The story of the Resurrection continues to be our story. The hope of the Resurrection continues to be our hope. The truth is this day, this Easter Day, marks a transformation that changed the world. It marks the transformation that changed the disciples' world. Those disciples, who were hiding in that upper room, were afraid. Those disciples that had scattered and left Jesus as He was

going through the humiliation of His trial, His beating, and His crucifixion. Even Peter who with great conviction said to Jesus even if I must die, I will never leave you and Jesus says “this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny three times that you even know Me”³ but do not be afraid because I go to prepare a place for you and if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come back and bring you to Myself.⁴

You see, Peter wanted to be faithful. Do you want to be faithful? I do. I do but am I always? No. I'm a lot like Peter. But Jesus' response is to say “Peter, it's okay because I am going to make the way for you. I'm going to prepare the place for you. You don't have to prepare it for yourself. I'm going to come and get you and bring you to Myself.

The truth is that story of transformation becomes the resurrection hope. Resurrection hope is realized in the lives of all of the disciples. Their lives changed radically from living in fear and uncertainty to living radical lives of hope and conviction and sharing the Gospel. Most of them ended up giving their lives. It wasn't easy after the Resurrection, but they were given a hope that sustained them in the midst of the struggle.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we're celebrating Easter, but that doesn't mean our lives are easy. Does it? There are those sitting among us right now dealing with cancer. Some of our brothers and sisters in Christ have been told about the terminal illness of people they love deeply. Many here this morning are experiencing some form of grief for a loved one that they have lost. But we do not grieve as those without hope. We grieve as those with a Resurrection Hope. That promise of Resurrection is a promise in Jesus for us. And so that hope gives us the courage to move forward. That hope sustains us in the difficult times.

By the way, let me just say there are times when I get discouraged. There are times when my faith feels a little light. It's those times that I turn to my brothers and sisters and I experience encouragement in and through them. I turned to my lovely wife who supports and encourages me. I turn to my great colleague who supports and encourages me. I'm reminded that while each one of us received this promise from Christ that through His death and resurrection, we are made right with God, through our faith in Jesus, we are promised eternity, we are also promised a community, our brothers and sisters in Christ that can walk with us through the difficult days, who can sustain us, in fact, who can carry us through those days. What a gift it is to be a part of the family of God! And it was

³ Matthew 26:34-35

⁴ John 14:2-3

wonderful this morning at 6:30 to gather with the community of faith beyond just St Timothy's, with our neighbors next door and our neighbors who worship in the Carter building, brothers and sisters, in the Kingdom of God, in the promise of Jesus,

I was reading this week in John Ortberg's book, *Who is This Man?* He wrote, "The disciples came to understand themselves to have a mission or a calling. Their task was: 1) form a community that reflected the presence and power of the God they learned about from Jesus; 2) extend the love of this community to everyone; and 3) invite anyone who's interested to join them. When persecution came and they were scattered, they took this as a summons to spread the Word and that's precisely what they did."⁵

Listen to these words from the early Church in Acts 10, "Then Peter began to speak: 'I now realize ... that God does not show favoritism.'"⁶ He began to realize that, while Jesus preached primarily and often only to the Jews, the Church realized that Jesus is the Messiah of the Jews, but also of the Gentiles. He realized that God loves everyone. By the way, that's something that we also don't do very well, but are called to do in Jesus' name. Then listen to this, "You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all."⁷ When we proclaim the love of Jesus who died on the cross for us, we're talking about the Lord Jesus who died on the cross for everyone. So when we share that good news of God's love, there can be no doubt when we say "God loves you" to everyone we're talking to. It is the truth of who God is.

Listen to this, also from Acts 10, "He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that He is the One who God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about Him that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name."⁸ Everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins in His name. Amen? First time you heard it, right?

Hopefully, we hear it every Sunday. Hopefully, that's a part of our ongoing proclamation. Why do we keep repeating ourselves? Because when we look in the mirror and we see that we've fallen short, we sometimes forget that He still loves us. When we recognize our shortcomings, we sometimes have a temptation to believe the devil when he says, "Oh, but not you. Not you." So we need to be reminded that God loves you, that you are forgiven, that the promise for eternity

⁵ Ortberg, John. *Who Is This Man?* Zondervan 2012.

⁶ Acts 10:34

⁷ Acts 10:36

⁸ Acts 10:42-43

is yours, and we can live with that kind of hope and security and reassurance, and we do that by being reminded to confess our sins every day and to experience the new life of the power of God at work within us through our faith, that we receive again by the Holy Spirit, when our friends remind us that Jesus loves us.

Listen to what Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, a beautiful prayer in Ephesians 1. "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may **know the hope** to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in His holy people, and His incomparably **great power** for us who believe. [listen] **That power is the same as the mighty strength He exerted when He raised Christ from the dead.**"⁹ The power of God that we celebrate today, that raised Jesus from the dead, is offered to all of us for our lives, for our encouragement.

So day by day, we need to be reminded of that promise because we go through our lives forgetting. We run out of gas forgetting that there's a gas can in the trunk with plenty of gas left in it. We seem to think if we can't do it, it can't be done. But what God is able to do through us and our brothers and sisters in Christ will blow your mind. So we're called to live in the power of that Resurrection.

Listen to Colossians. "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ."¹⁰ You have been raised with Christ, right? You have been raised with Christ, right? [murmurs of yes] Amen. "**Since you have been raised with Christ**, set your **hearts** on things above ... Set your **minds** on things above ... For you died, and your life is now hidden in Christ. When Christ, **who is your life**, appears, then you will also appear with Him in glory."¹¹ Has Jesus been glorified? Amen. Will you be glorified? Yes! Right along with Him because He shares His glory with you. That's the bizarre trade that He made on the cross. He took your sin so that you could be set free and He shares His glory with us, who are in Christ Jesus. We have an amazing eternity ahead, so that we grieve and we struggle and we know pain and hardship, but all with the hope and the knowledge of the promise of God that is made to us.

We are invited to experience the Resurrection Life. We are invited to realize that power in our life each day. That's the hope of the Resurrection. That's why as the church we gather on the first day of the week to celebrate the resurrection because that Resurrection is shared with us. We've died to sin and we live to Christ, and we are called to come and see, and go and tell, so that others might know the hope that is ours in Christ Jesus. Amen.

⁹ Ephesians 1:18-20

¹⁰ Colossians 3:1

¹¹ Colossians 3:1-4

