

*Resurrection of Our Lord*

Easter Sunday

April 16, 2017

Sermon by Pastor Cindy Bullock

The Holy Gospel according to Saint Matthew. (Matthew 28: 1-10)

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of 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 our Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

On the Friday that we call "Good," Jesus of Nazareth was crucified on behalf of the Roman Empire for crimes against the state. He joined thousands of men and women every year who were put to death by Roman justice.

Knowing Jesus once had a following, the local procurator, Pontius Pilate, put a guard in front of the tomb, until the followers would get tired and disperse. He had no idea what he was up against. No idea of the power of Easter life. He had no idea that the tomb was irrelevant. He was guarding the wrong place. Come with me now and enter the story.

It all begins after the Sabbath. The day after the day after the funeral. Mary and Mary come to the tomb, because what else do you do after your life has fallen apart? We know what that's like. Who has not had the epic fail at work? Who has not sat in front of a test and thought, "I have absolutely no idea what this question is about." We all know about the fight to end all fights with the one we love. And then there is just the reading the newspaper, with worldwide political upheaval and violence.

The women came to the tomb with that haze, where you don't want to think about it, and you're kind of wishing that the earth would open up and swallow you whole. Do you know what I mean – that hollow sadness?

The day after the day after the funeral, they come to the tomb, where it is quiet and restful. And even if everything else is changing around them, they know this: at least the dead stay dead. Or not.

First, there is an earthquake. There is a great earthquake. Then there is something like lightening that turns out to be an angel. And this angel's got attitude. He rolls away the stone, and he plops down on top of it, just like it's all part of the job. Like remarkable, mind-blowing, earth-shaking occurrences just happen every day. Like every day has life and Easter possibilities and hidden wonders, and we're just not paying enough attention. Like we're too focused on death to see life, too occupied to see the world shake. The angel acts like it's an everyday occurrence. The women go into shock.

The soldiers see it, too. And they hit the deck. They have no idea what they are up against. It is a fearsome thing to have the world fall out from under your feet. If strength and power are not enough to keep you safe, if the great empire cannot protect you, if all you know and trust turns out to not be true, what do you do? It is a terrible and fearful thing. The most fearful thing in the world is to be out of control. How do you respond to Easter power that changes everything? What do you do when a whole new reality opens in front of you? The soldiers are terrified.

But the angel just ignores the soldiers, and turns to the women and says, "*Do not be afraid.*" You are sad and shocked and terrified, but do not be afraid. The angel says, "*Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus.*"

You know, this might be way too good for one voice. Pull out your bulletins, and we're going to read it together. Get into the act. Give it a little drama. And we are going to read the angel's message, beginning with "*Do not be afraid.*" Got it? Let's do it.

*"Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will find him.'"*

"*He is not here.*" "*He has been raised.*" Even with earthquakes and lightening, and angels and soldiers crashing to the ground, the tomb is not where it's at. The tomb is, well, it's empty. It's irrelevant. Why hang out there? Why hang out in sadness and shock and terror? There is something way more exciting somewhere else.

“But,” you say, “it’s the empty tomb! Don’t you want to stay and celebrate the empty tomb on Easter? Don’t you want to examine it, and analyze it, and explain it, and demand proof about it, and argue about it, and meditate at it?” The empty tomb is really tempting for believers, and for nonbelievers, and for scholars and for mystics. It is tempting for us.

But the angel doesn’t say, “Go to the empty tomb.” Ever. In every Gospel, the message is always, “*Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here. He is risen.*” Not here. Jesus is somewhere else.

“*Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.*” You will see Jesus in Galilee. There, not here. In Galilee. The tomb is irrelevant. “*Go to Galilee.*”

Now, this is not terribly specific. This is not saying, “Meet me in the parking lot of that hotel where we traded cars once.” This is not saying, “Meet me at that place where we used to have burgers on Tuesday nights.” This is saying, “Meet me in Lakeville.” Vague, for sure. And while Lakeville is a nice place, it’s not exactly the center of religious activity in the region. So where do they go? Galilee was just home for these guys. There are a lot of places to meet him.

Exactly. Go home. Get out there. Get back to your life and your work. Jesus will meet you there. Jesus will meet you. Jesus never said you have to understand this, or even believe it. Jesus will meet you. His only instruction is get out there. Go, live your life, and Jesus will find you. You don’t have to go searching. Jesus will come where you are, even if where you are is deeply hurt and grieving. Even if where you are is full of questions and uncertainty. Even if where you are is terribly afraid. Jesus will meet you where you are.

Jesus will meet you and invite you into a new kind of life, reality redefined, where death no longer defines us. Where power for newness is loose in the world. Where Jesus Christ, the risen Christ, comes to us, and invites us into a life of joy and hope, and reaching out to this lonely, broken world in service and love.

We are, from Easter onward, the beloved children of God. We are people of a resurrection. The risen Christ comes to us wherever we are, at work, at dinner, while we’re doing the laundry, while we’re walking down the neighborhood street. And if the risen Christ comes to us wherever we are, how can we spend our lives fearing and avoiding death? If the risen Christ comes to us, how can we not follow him into the world? If the risen Christ comes, how can we not live lives of compassion and mercy and generosity?

Get out there. The empty tomb is irrelevant. Jesus is not there. Jesus is here and wherever you go.

Amen.