

+ Easter Sunday: The Resurrection of our Lord – April 12, 2020 +
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Matthew 28:1-10 After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. 2 Suddenly, there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, and going to the tomb, he rolled away the stone and was sitting on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. 4 The guards were so terrified of him that they shook and became like dead men. 5 The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid! I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. 6 He is not here. He has risen, just as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. 7 Go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has risen from the dead! And look, he is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see him.’ See, I have told you!” 8 They hurried away from the tomb, with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 Suddenly[a] Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” They approached, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go, tell my brothers that they should go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”

How did we ever get here? Do you ever look around your life today and think that? Maybe its when you haven't seen your neighbors for two, going on three weeks. Maybe it's when you look at our gathering this morning, and instead of being inside a church and hugging each other and shaking hands, we're waving at each other through the windows of our cars, (Or you're waving at a computer or TV screen.) Think back to early March. We were living life, going here and there, doing this and that, making plans for the rest of the school year and the summer, and maybe the months beyond that. And now, here we are, locked down in our homes and wondering when life will get back to normal -- and not only that, we're wondering what normal will actually be like when we get to go back to it. So much has happened so fast, and all the uncertainty, all the change, and the fact that all of it was so unexpected has a way of making you feel defeated, doesn't it?

If that's what you're feeling today, that's got to be just the tip of the iceberg for how the two Mary's felt on Easter morning as they went to see Jesus' tomb. So much had happened so fast. Just a week earlier, they couldn't believe how Jesus entered into Jerusalem -- he was welcomed as a King! It was Hosanna to the Son of David. But then Thursday evening he was betrayed. Then he stood trial before both the Jewish high court and the Roman governor, and was condemned to death by both. Then he was crucified, and finally died and was placed in a tomb. The person they had trusted, counted on, and loved was gone. The person they thought was the promised one sent from God was dead -- along with their hopes. Now here they were, wondering what the future held for them because it was remarkably different than it was just a week before. I'm sure they looked at everything and said, “How did we ever get here?” They had to have felt utterly defeated as they walked to the tomb that morning trying to make sense of it all.

But, something else had happened that morning -- maybe even while they were on their way to the tomb -- an angel came down from heaven. The battle-hardened soldiers that had been guarding the tomb became so afraid at this angel that they themselves convulsed and fainted. The angel rolled away the stone that sat at the entrance to Jesus' tomb and used it as his own park bench. Put yourself into the shoes of those women when they arrive. They were expecting to find the tomb sealed, but it was open. They were expecting to find soldiers standing guard, but

they were passed out. They were expecting to find the body of Jesus, but the only one they found was this angel. What was going on?

Listen to the angel. First, he instructs them: **“Do not be afraid! I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here. He has risen, just as he said.”** I know why you came here -- to see the body of Jesus. But he's not here because he has been raised from the dead! At least three times he told you himself that this was going to happen! Next, he invites them: **Come, see the place where the Lord lay.** Don't just take my word for it, see for yourself that he's not here. And then he sends them: **Go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has risen from the dead! And look, he is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see him.’** So the women do it. They hurry away with a new emotion in their hearts. They're afraid -- they're not sure what to make of it all and what it means for them. It's all so new, all so unknown -- and yet they're filled with joy. Could it really be true? Could Jesus be alive? Could all their hopes that had been dead just 36 hours earlier suddenly be raised to life along with Jesus? Could it be that they were right, that Jesus really IS the promised one sent from God? Could it be? And suddenly, there's Jesus, alive and real and right in front of them. What else could they do at this point but fall at his feet and worship him!

So what are we to take from all this? The first thing is quite simple. Easter is real. It happened. Jesus really did die and rise again in his own body. It might be something you've known since you were little, or maybe it's something you're wrestling with for the first time - but it's real. There are several ways that Matthew brings this out. Here two of them. The first one is that he sets these events at a precise date and time. It's after the sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week. This isn't some “a long time ago in far-away land” kind of thing. It's specific. This day. This time. This place. That's the language of history. The details invite questions and investigation. The second is in what the women do when they see Jesus. Matthew doesn't just say that they fell down and worshipped him -- but that they specifically took hold of his feet. Why specifically mention that they touched his feet? Think about all the images that you can conjure up in your mind of ghosts and spirits. What do they never have? Feet! In folklore from around the world, spirits and ghosts appear without feet or legs. But not Jesus. He has feet! The risen Jesus has feet that can be stood on and touched and even grabbed. This means that he rose from the grave not as a spirit, but in his body. Matthew tells us about Jesus' feet because what happened on Easter indeed was a real, bodily resurrection.

And because what happened on Easter is real, it has enormous implications for us today -- especially when we're feeling beat up by life and defeated. Because Easter is real, there are four words that can define your life. The angel said it, Jesus said it: The four words that can define your life are: **“Do not be afraid.”**

You don't have to be afraid of your failures. I don't know about you, but the past few weeks haven't exactly brought out the best in me. I've gotten short tempered with my kids and impatient with my wife. I've felt a load of demands that the circumstances have placed onto me -- Plans changing overnight and hours of work down the drain, having to learn new ways of doing familiar tasks on the fly, without a lot of training and guidance -- and then everyone else's work seems to end up looking a lot better than mine does. Have you felt that way? Or maybe now you're laid off work and you're afraid you won't be able to provide for your family because you couldn't manage to save up enough to live on for a few months if you needed to. Or maybe you've messed up big time in recent months and it's caused a lot of hurt and pain in your life and

the lives of those you care about. Whatever it might be, you don't have to be afraid of your failures.

Here's why. Did you catch what Jesus said to the women? He told them to go and tell his disciples to meet him in Galilee -- except he didn't call them his disciples -- he called them his brothers. These same guys who were slow to understand him, who all but one had abandoned him -- even when they said they never would. These same guys who left him to suffer alone, Jesus calls them brothers. How can he do that? He forgives them. He forgives them because he lived perfectly in their place, died under their sin and rose again. And if that's how Jesus can forgive his disciples for how they hurt him -- it's certainly powerful enough for him to forgive you and me our failures before him too. So we don't have to be afraid of our failures because of one life, one death, and one victorious empty tomb.

Because Easter is real, you also don't have to be afraid of death. Death did its worst to Jesus on the cross. It went at him with everything it has, and on Easter, Jesus was victorious. By his own death, Jesus broke the power of its master, sin. And by his resurrection he broke the bonds of death. While death can still separate us from loved ones for a time, it cannot separate us from Jesus. So Easter comes with a promise. Death does not have the last word over you. Instead, death -- is just like going to sleep. Eventually you'll wake up. That means that we will be resurrected just like Jesus was. No matter what happens to you in this life, death cannot hold you. You will rise again to live in a perfect world with your perfect savior and that can never be taken away from you. We don't have to be afraid of death because of one life, one death, and one victorious empty tomb.

And finally, because Easter is real, you don't have to be afraid of uncertainty. I don't know what tomorrow holds. Neither do you. We don't know how we're going to come out of all the shut down -- maybe everything will pick up where it left off, maybe it won't and we'll be in for some economic hard times the likes of which most in our generations haven't seen. We don't know if anyone we know and love will get sick with this virus and how they'll react to it. Maybe we'll all be fine, but maybe we won't. But no matter what life throws at us, and no matter how bad it might get in our world and in our lives, because sin and death have been defeated -- all of it is going to come to a blessed and glorious end. Easter means that a day is coming when poverty, danger, and disaster are banished forever. So no matter what the next 50 days or 50 years holds for you, in Jesus Christ your forever is fixed and it is glorious. We don't have to be afraid of uncertainty because of one life, one death, and one victorious empty tomb.

So we might not know how we got here. We might feel defeated by what's going on in the world today. We might be clobbered by more bad news. But none of it changes Easter. None of it changes what Jesus did in time and history 2000 years ago. None of it changes what Jesus accomplished for you and me. Easter means that Jesus is victorious over our sin -- we're forgiven. Easter means that Jesus is victorious over death -- it couldn't hold him and it cannot hold you. And Easter means that Jesus is victorious over all our uncertainties and fears -- All of it because of one life, one death, and one victorious empty tomb. Friends, Jesus, your savior is victorious! So don't be afraid! AMEN!