

Sermon for Easter Day, 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."

Alleluia. Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Blessings to you on this Easter morning, a quieter Easter morning than most of us have ever experienced. It's quiet, much as it must have been in the garden outside of Jerusalem when, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. They went quietly, in deep grief for all that had been lost. Some of us know what it's like to be that deep in grief, fearful for what will come next, and anxious for how we will manage to get through not only life, but the next day, the next hour, the next minute. And if their grief and fear from such loss were not enough, 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.

Earthquakes happen. We can analyze them and measure them, but we cannot really predict them. Oh, we can have a good idea that one is imminent, but we never really know the strength of it until afterwards.

New viruses are a lot like earthquakes. We know they will happen, and when they do, we can research them and track the spread, and predict the number of people who are likely to become infected. But we never really know the strength of a virus until it's been contained and we have the final statistics and are able to develop a vaccine.

Like earthquakes and viruses, death happens. We know that we will eventually die and we like to think that we will live a long and healthy life. We make a lot of assumptions, don't we? This pandemic has surely shattered our assumptions, shaken our world, and infected our hope. Like the women, we are fearful of what will come next. Like the guards at the tomb we become like dead men, paralyzed in our fear and anxiety.

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." Just as the fear and uncertainty filled the early morning air in the garden that day, it fills our world right now, and we might be wondering how we can have Easter this year.

Earthquakes happen. Viruses happen. Death happens. But thanks be to God, Easter happens! The Gospel tells us that Jesus is risen, and with that Resurrection news comes the promise of new life for us all, both now and in eternity. This year, more than ever, we need this good news. The angel told the women to come and see! And when they opened the eyes of their hearts, they saw Jesus.

In all of the anxiety and fear of our world right now, where are you seeing Jesus in those angels, those messengers from God, who come to assist you and calm your fears? Certainly, in the tireless efforts of doctors and nurses on the front lines, the first responders, and respiratory therapists. Those who work behind the scenes cleaning the hospitals and keeping equipment functioning, lab workers running tests, and chaplains praying with patients and staff. We see them in car companies who have transformed their assembly lines to make much needed ventilators. They are the farmers, field laborers, grocery distributors and cashiers who provide our most basic necessities. In their selfless actions they reveal the risen Lord to us.

Once Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were able to see Jesus, they were able to go quickly and tell the others, “He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.” Who are we telling about the power of the Resurrection? Are we showing others the power of the Resurrection within us?

I have seen Jesus throughout this Lenten wilderness, throughout this time of isolation. So many acts of kindness as messengers from God sew face masks, deliver groceries, homemade cookies, and toilet paper. They have stripped palms, filled Easter baskets, and created worship packets for Holy Week. Volunteers have given rides to medical appointments, made calls to check on neighbors, and delivered Holy Week packets to our families and those who cannot get out. Even in this fearful quarantine, the power of the Resurrection is so visible.

Jesus said to the women, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.” Remember, that Galilee was home for the disciples. Jesus told them to go home and he would meet them there. Home where they would be safe from danger. Home where, in days to come, they would share with each other all the ways they had seen the risen Christ. Home where they would pray and recall the words Jesus spoke and his mighty healing acts.

This Easter we are experiencing exactly what those very first disciples did, as they witnessed and proclaimed the Resurrection from their homes. We cannot be together in an overflowing church for Easter, joyful as that is, but we can share our joy as we tell our personal stories of good news in this world. Tell one another the stories of the earthquakes in your lives. Write down for your grandchildren the stories of Christ at work during these pandemic days.

In this world there will be earthquakes, viruses, and loss of every kind. But our belief in the risen Christ will give us strength - strength to move beyond our grief and fear and into joy. No matter what happens in our lives, Jesus is going ahead of us. And as Resurrection people we are called to follow Jesus, and share our own Resurrection stories.

Alleluia. Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.