

Matthew 28:1-10

¹After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the tomb. ²Look, there was a great earthquake, for an angel from the Lord came down from heaven. Coming to the stone, he rolled it away and sat on it. ³Now his face was like lightning and his clothes as white as snow. ⁴The guards were so terrified of him that they shook with fear and became like dead men. ⁵But the angel said to the women, “Don’t be afraid. I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶He isn’t here, because he’s been raised from the dead, just as he said. Come, see the place where they laid him. ⁷Now hurry, go and tell his disciples, ‘He’s been raised from the dead. He’s going on ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there.’ I’ve given the message to you.”

⁸With great fear and excitement, they hurried away from the tomb and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹But Jesus met them and greeted them. They came and grabbed his feet and worshipped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Go and tell my brothers that I am going into Galilee. They will see me there.”



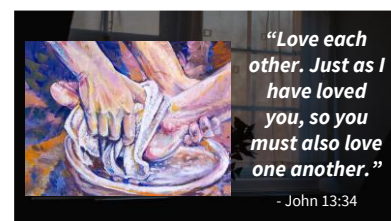
As we begin this time together, we remind ourselves that Easter is not the end. Yes, it concludes Holy Week. But it also begins the Easter season – the six Sundays after today that will focus on the stories that we tell about Jesus and about our faith. Today, Easter Sunday, is a day to tell the big story of our faith and to allow this good news to recharge our faith and to prepare us for the journey that lies ahead. As we prepare to enter into this time with the Mary’s and the risen Christ, let us begin with a word of prayer...

God of Love, you have changed death into life. You have changed our fear into courage. You have changed despair into hope. Change our hearts, that being raised with Christ we may live brand new lives, in the mystery and the power of your love. It is with this hope that I ask you, O God, to bless the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts. You are our rock and our redeemer, our Christ and our king. Amen.

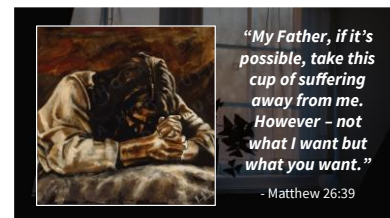
Please turn with me to Matthew 28 as we dive into the story of Jesus' resurrection. Before we turn to verse 1, though, a little background, a little context. From Thursday through Saturday, it has been a whirlwind in the life of the disciples of Jesus. The week began with what we know as Palm Sunday, when Jesus triumphally entered Jerusalem to shouts of "Hosanna!" In many ways this celebration must have felt to the disciples like the culmination of Jesus' teachings and miracles. People were finally seeing Jesus as the Messiah, as the Savior, that they saw him to be. Three long years of ministry – culminating on this grand day.

But as the week unfolded, after many challenging teachings and confrontations with the religious leaders, Jesus gathered with his closest disciples in an upper room on Thursday evening to celebrate the Passover. It was in this secluded location that Jesus washed the disciples' feet, setting for them an example to follow. In John 13:34 he told them, *"Love each other. Just as I have loved you, so you must also love one another."* After giving them this example and command, Jesus returned to the table and took bread and broke

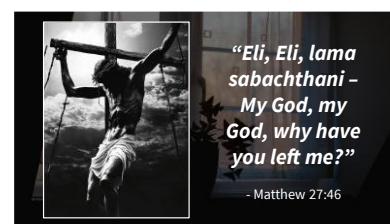
it, took the wine and blessed it. Jesus told them that this represented his body and blood, which would be broken and shed for them and for many, establishing a new covenant. At that point, the disciples had no idea what soon lay ahead. We will remember this gift that Jesus gave to all of his disciples, then and now, later when we celebrate Holy Communion.



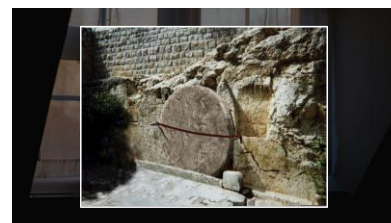
From that upper room, Jesus took the disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. It was there, in the garden, where the disciples slept as Jesus prayed, *“My Father, if it’s possible, take this cup of suffering away from me. However – not what I want but what you want.”* Soon Judas would show up, leading the party that would arrest Jesus. Jesus stood “trial” before the religious leaders at the home of the high priest. It was there that Peter denied even knowing Jesus, three times before the rooster crowed.



By early Friday morning the chief priests and religious elders had reached a decision to kill Jesus for his blasphemy – he claimed he was God’s Son. But they did not have the power to execute Jesus, so they took him to Pilate, the Roman Governor. Through the power of the crowd, Jesus was condemned to crucifixion. Jesus was mocked and beaten by the soldiers then forced to carry his cross to Golgotha, the site for Roman executions. There the soldiers drove spikes into his wrists and ankles then lifted him up to die a slow, painful death. From noon until about 3:00 a darkness fell over Israel. At about three in the afternoon, Jesus said, *“Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani – My God, my God, why have you left me?”* With a loud cry, Jesus died.



At this point, most of the disciples were nowhere to be found. Just John was there with the women – Mary Magdalene, Jesus’ mother Mary, and John’s mother. The two Mary’s watched Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus take Jesus’ body off the cross, wrap his body in a clean linen cloth, and then lay Jesus’ body in Joseph’s new tomb. A large stone was rolled in place, just before the start of the Sabbath – sunset on Friday. That was it. For the disciples, for the Mary’s, it felt like the story of Jesus had come to a close. The end.



Can you imagine what that Saturday, what that Sabbath day felt like for the followers of Jesus? How would you get through a day set aside to worship the Lord your God on the day after Jesus died and was laid in the tomb? How could you possibly be still and focus on worshipping God, let alone on anything else?

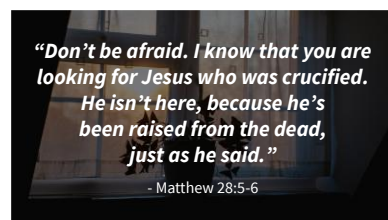
Connecting into our time today, to this time in which we are living, it sometimes feels like death and defeat are not far away. Sometimes it feels like physical death, sometimes it feels like the death of things that we once held dear. In her Easter message this week, our resident bishop, Bishop Plambeck, reminded us that our world is not so different from their world. We live in a world where we look around and often say with certainty, "This is not what God intended or intends." We live in a world where nations struggle and communities divide. We live in a world where families carry grief and bodies carry illness, where many labor long hours for wages that barely sustain life. We live in a world where anxiety, loneliness, depression, exhaustion, and despair quietly settle into people's bones. Some among us live with great stability and comfort. Others live with deep want and uncertainty. We can relate to how Mary and Mary felt as they made their way to the tomb.



As we turn to verse 1 of Matthew 28, we do so with all of these thoughts and emotions. At dawn, at the very moment the Sabbath ended, the two Mary's head to the tomb. Now that the Sabbath rest is over, the women could go to the tomb to properly prepare Jesus' body. In Luke's gospel we learn that the women were bringing spices with them to accomplish this task. None of the gospels record any thoughts from the woman about how to deal with the huge stone that had been rolled into place to seal the tomb.

One does not always think straight when wrapped in deep grief. They expected nothing except the completion of mourning. They expected to tend to death amid despair. But instead, they encountered the impossible.

Matthew paints the scene this way: the ground shakes as an angel descends from heaven. He rolls away the stone as the guards “*shook with fear and became like dead men.*” Face shining like the sun, the angel sits atop the stone and answers the two Mary’s unspoken questions this way: “*Don’t be afraid. I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He isn’t here, because he’s been raised from the dead, just as he said.*” There is so much in these sentences. The Roman centurions? Those battle-tested soldiers? They are so afraid that they cannot move. Yes, the Sabbath is over, and yes, you were here when Joseph and Nicodemus laid him hastily in the tomb. Yes, you have your spices to offer his body one last act of love. Yes, I know that is why you are here. But Jesus and his body – they are not here. Just as he told you and the other disciples, he will rise from the dead.



The angel then gives the women instructions, telling them, “*Now hurry, go and tell his disciples, ‘He’s been raised from the dead. He’s going on ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there.’*” The first Christian missionaries head off to do just that. And do you see how they went? In the next verse we read that Mary and Mary went “*with great fear and excitement.*” This sounds right for the moment, doesn’t it? What has happened is unsettling enough to be frightening and it is wonderful enough to lead to hope and excitement. But the women do not get very far. Seemingly as the turn to go tell the disciples, the risen Christ is right there. Recognizing Jesus, they fell at his feet and worshipped him.

Jesus tells the woman essentially what the angel had told them:

“Don’t be afraid. Go and tell my brothers that I am going into Galilee. They will see me there.” Jesus will return to where his ministry began. There he will restore and redeem Peter. As Jesus is

about to ascend into heaven, he knew that his time on earth was over. In that moment, he passes the mantle to the disciples. He gives the disciples the command to continue the mission, to go into the whole world to make more disciples. It was

a new start to a whole new ministry. He passes the task of making disciples of Jesus Christ on to his disciples. The task of spreading the good news, of offering hope and peace and joy and love and

mercy and grace and forgiveness and generosity and healing to a world in need would now

be carried on by Jesus’ followers. This is not an easy task, my friends.



This is why resurrection is not just about happy endings. Resurrection isn’t the same as “bouncing back.” There’s no “back” to it. It’s about being plunged *forward*, into a new life that’s not just more of the old one. Resurrection is more like an unexpected beginning – a new start – than a happy ending. God miraculously creates life where there was none and, more so, where there was no potential for life. Resurrection is not the same as near-death. It’s actual death. Failure. Surrender. It’s out of the brokenness of our lives and our world that resurrection comes.

No, resurrection is not a return to what was, it is a transformation to something new.

Resurrection is the transformation that happens when we surrender to love. It is surrendering our lives to Maundy Thursday’s command to love as Jesus loves.

On the personal side, when we give our lives in love, God gives us new life – a life filled with hope and peace and joy and love and all of the other blessings that come from a relationship with God.

And when we move outside of ourselves, offering all that we are in love, surrendering to how and where and when God can use us and our love, then God's love transforms broken systems, injustices, and other evils. As we follow the command to love, our world become new too. Our world comes to know the hope, peace, joy, and love that we know in our hearts. This command to love as Jesus first loved us has continued down through the generations of Jesus' disciples. We – you and me – we are now the ones called to share the good news, to be the good news, to help others to know the hope, peace, joy, love, mercy, grace, forgiveness, generosity, and healing that Jesus offers.

In this world, just as in that ancient one, the Easter proclamation still breaks open the morning: Christ is risen. This breaking open is not an idea. It is not as a metaphor. It is the stubborn, holy claim that death does not have the final word in this. The resurrection of Jesus does not erase the suffering or instantly solve the conflicts of our time. It does something more powerful. It interrupts the story that says the world is irreparable and unredeemable. Resurrection interrupts the story that our world marked by war, famine, disease, injustice, and oppression cannot be redeemed or restored. Resurrection tells another story – a story of hope and love and peace and redemption and restoration.

Easter says, “God is always at work, God is still at work, bringing life into places marked by death.” Easter reminds us that life can emerge from sealed tombs, that hope can rise where fear once ruled, that love can outlast violence, and that death does not and will not have final word. This is why the faithful gather, sing, pray, and dare to proclaim this ancient greeting: Christ is risen! **Christ is risen indeed!** Christ is risen! **Christ is risen indeed!** Alleluia and amen.

Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. When has someone been like Jesus to you, bringing you hope or comfort, grace or forgiveness, peace or hope? How did it affect you? How can you pass it on?
- 2) *Pray*. Everyone has moments when we are separated from God or from one another. Think of someone you know in this state and pray for this broken relationship to be healed and restored each day this week.
- 3) *Study*. Read Matthew 28:16-20. How does knowing Jesus’ teachings and obeying them help us in our task of making disciples of all nations?