

**The End That Wasn't**

Easter Sunday

April 9, 2023

**Matthew 28:1-10**

*<sup>1</sup>After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. <sup>4</sup>For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. <sup>5</sup>But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. <sup>6</sup>He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. <sup>7</sup>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." <sup>8</sup>So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to tell his disciples. <sup>9</sup>Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. <sup>10</sup>Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."*



Good morning! We began this journey by wandering in the wilderness. There we, along with Christ, acknowledged our hungers. We came to Jesus at night, along with Nicodemus

the Pharisee, and there we learned what it means to be born again. We met him in the middle of the day, there by the well, and there we found the living water, there we found unconditional love. We stood in front of the stone as he wept with Mary and Martha. We stared as the stone was rolled away and marveled as Jesus displayed power over even death. And we kept moving forward with Jesus, parading into Jerusalem to shouts of "Hosanna!" During that last week we experienced much.

We sat at the table as the Lord washed our feet and then as he broke the bread and shared the cup, offering us a new covenant based upon his love and mercy and grace. Later that night Jesus took us to the garden. He invited us to pray with him, but sleep overtook us again and again. They came to arrest him. That mob woke us from our slumber. Lastly, we stood and watched from afar, as they tried and beat and finally crucified the Messiah, the Savior of the world. We walked with him as they laid him on that cross, that place of shame. We walked with... No, we didn't. We wanted to walk right there beside Jesus. But our fears took over once again. We deserted Jesus in the hour when he needed us most. We denied him. We betrayed him. And then we wept as the darkness descended upon the world. And now here we are. As we prepare to hear the rest of the story, let us begin with a word of prayer...

Saturday was a hard day for those who had been following Jesus. The Sabbath was always a day of quiet, a time to rest and to reflect on one's faith. But this Sabbath was different. There was a stillness, an emptiness. It pressed down on his followers, feeling like a weight too great to bear. It was all that they could think about. His death. Jesus' death. The one who had breathed so much life into them had drawn his last breath. It felt like the air had left their lungs that day too. So this day was a day of wondering. What happened to that hope that had filled their hearts? What happened to the one who came to rescue the least, the lost, the sick, the broken, the outcasts, the outsiders, the outlaws, and the sinners? Where do we go now? What do we do on this day of grief and gloom and darkness? When death seems all around us, where else should we go but to the cemetery?

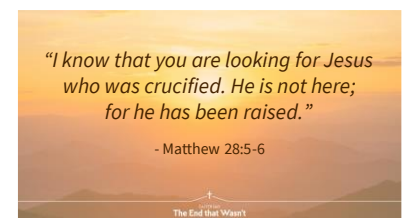


Turn with me to Matthew 28 as we begin to unpack the day after utter darkness fell upon the whole world. The Sabbath ends with sunrise. So early in the morning Mary and Mary Magdalene head to the grave site. They went to see the tomb.

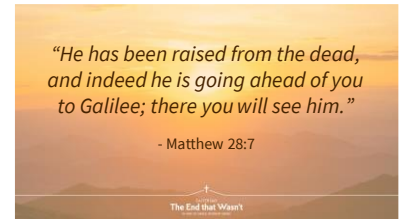
What could they have expected? Death, tombs, stones. Mary and Mary went to weep, to mourn the loss of their Savior. All hope was gone. There was just death. It felt like the end as they arrived at the tomb.

And then heaven and earth moved. In verse 2 we read, *“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.”* An angel sat atop the stone as if it was the throne of God in heaven. Those left to guard the tomb shook and *“became like dead men”* right where they were. Then the angel spoke: *“Do not be afraid.”* Those words have been spoken again and again in the scriptures. Those words are whispered into our hearts and minds again and again by the Holy Spirit. Our greatest enemy is not death. It is fear. The fear of death, yes, but the fear of abandonment, the fear of failure, the fear of disappointing others, the fear of letting God down – they all try and grasp us. Maybe some of these are your fears. This is but a short list. We are gripped by many fears, too many to name. Our fears, whatever yours are, whatever mine are – they can cripple us. They can bind us. They can limit us in so many ways. To Mary and Mary, the words *“Do not be afraid”* were like a light shining in the darkness.

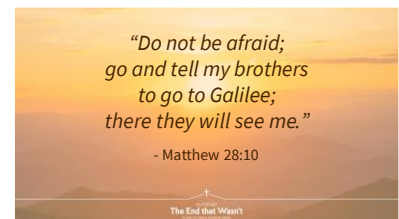
And then the angel continues, saying, *“I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised.”* The one who was killed. The one who was laid in this tomb. He is not here. He has been raised from the dead.



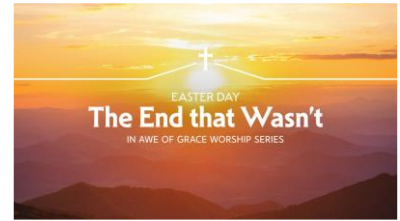
To offer some reassurance, some proof, the angel invites Mary and Mary to see where Jesus had been laid. They had been there Friday night when he was laid in the tomb. They knew. There was nothing there but grave cloths. In a place filled with nothing but death, there was now hope. Filled with this hope, the women are sent with this good news: *“He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.”* There it is again. He has been raised from the dead. What Jesus said again and again has come true. *“In three days I will rise again.”* How those words must have been echoing joy in their hearts. It was with this hope and joy that the women left quickly and ran to tell the disciples this great and wonderful news.



And just as Jesus had promised too, he was suddenly there with them once again. In verse 9 we read, *“Suddenly Jesus met them and said, ‘Greetings!’”* Mary and Mary fall at Jesus’ feet, and they worship the risen Christ. Jesus himself echoes the words of the angel, saying, *“Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”* Those fears, those doubts, those denials – they have not separated Jesus from the disciples. He still calls them *“my brothers.”* Jesus understands that fear gets the best of us sometimes. What would drive a wedge into many relationships that we have did not even phase Jesus. For the one who took on flesh to understand and experience what we feel and think and go through, Jesus’ unconditional love continued to override all barriers and all obstacles. Even though the disciples had utterly failed Jesus, he still called them *“my brothers.”* He does the same for you and for me.



And, because of that great love, what appeared to be the end really wasn't the end. But why Galilee? Why go there? Galilee was home to many of the disciples. Much of Jesus' ministry had taken place in this area to the north of Jerusalem.



Galilee was a comfortable place, a place most of the disciples knew. Jesus' promise was to go on ahead of the disciples. Here Jesus was connecting into the promises he had made. These are found in the other gospels. In Luke 24, Jesus told the disciples, *"And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised"* so that they would be *"clothed with power from on high."* And in John 15:26-27 Jesus told the disciples, *"When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning."* Here Jesus was laying the groundwork for the ministry to come. Jesus was preparing the disciples for this ministry by assuring them of his living presence – a presence that would give them the words to preach, the courage to face the challenges that lay ahead, the truth that would lead and guide their very lives. This living presence is there for me and for you too.

Now that we have explored what happened that first Easter morning according to the gospel of Matthew and now that we know that all who believe will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, now that we know the "facts," so to speak, we must ask: What does the resurrection mean for us? What does this event mean for you and for me? What does it mean for those who are seeking and for those who are lost in their sin or broken by a situation or circumstance in their lives?

First, because Jesus overcame the grave, because Jesus conquered the power of death, death has lost its power. For those who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, because he lives, we know that we too shall live. The promise of life eternal had been made real through the resurrection of the Messiah. Jesus is the firstborn of many who will follow him into heaven.

Second, the gift of the Holy Spirit empowers us to live faithfully, just as it has done since the risen Christ met the disciples in Galilee, where he breathed the Spirit upon them. For all who call on the name of Jesus as Lord, the Spirit fills out hearts and enables us to walk obediently and faithfully. Doing so, we express our faith through the ways that we love God and love neighbor more than self. Doing so, we encourage others by sharing the hope and joy that we know. Doing so, we invite others to know this Jesus who offers abundant life to all who believe. Through our lives and witness, others can see the risen Christ alive and still at work in the world. That is the message of Easter. Jesus is alive. And because he lives, Jesus still has the power to change lives. This day and every day, may the risen Lord lead and guide us, using us as his light and love in the world. May it be so for you and for me. Amen and amen.

### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Study**

- 1) *Grow*. How do you think finding the tomb empty and seeing the risen Christ affected Mary and Mary's faith? How does the resurrection impact your faith?
- 2) *Pray*. People we know are lost and hurting and broken. Pray that the Spirit will lead and guide you to share the living hope of Christ with someone this week.
- 3) *Study*. Read Matthew 28:16-20. Here in Galilee the resurrected Jesus is reunited with his disciples. What message do you take out of what he said to them?