



Sunday, April 17, 2022

Easter Sunday: Pastor John VanderWindt

Theme: The Risen Christ Sermon: Words of Easter

Scripture: Matthew 28:1-15

Happy Easter! He is Risen! What a great morning. What a great morning. And on this great morning, I walked into church and I went, "Oh, I forgot my Easter tie at home. But have no fear... Philippine and Audrey made me this great tie for this morning. So here we are. [Clapping from audience.] That's awesome.

We are here to celebrate the risen King. What a joyous event that is. This morning as we look at scripture, we're going to see how the words from scripture can bring life to us each day. I invite you to join with me in reading Scripture together. We're going to be joining at Matthew 28. Mike already read part of it this morning, but we're going to read it again because it's so important. We are going to look at three conversations which happened within this chapter. We're going to read the first 15 verses of Matthew 28, starting at verse one.

1 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 There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. **3** His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. **4** The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

5 The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. **6** He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. **7** Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

8 So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. **9** Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. **10** Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

The Guards' Report

11 While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. **12** When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, **13** telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' **14** If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." **15** So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

Join me in prayer.

Dear Lord, we come to you this morning. Lord, we celebrate the resurrected Christ. Lord, as we look at the words which You have spoken to us on this day, may we hear Your voice. Lord, may You speak to us in a new way to see Your resurrected self and Your incredible gift of life to us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

As I said before, we're going to look at three conversations.

1. There is the first conversation which happens between the women and the angels, albeit fairly one-sided.
2. There is a second conversation which happens between Jesus and the women. Again, one-sided.
3. Then there's a third conversation which happens between the chief priests and the guards.

Even though we hear only some of the words, that conversation is a dialogue, and we'll look at how that plays out as well.

But let's start with the first one with the women going to the tomb and seeing the angel. Now there is something very interesting about that situation. The women who approach the tomb are also the women who went and saw where Jesus was buried. You may recall, if you remember the story from Friday or if you read in Matthew 27, how the disciples abandoned Christ. The women went to see where the body was buried. And the women knew. Now on this Sunday morning, the women go there early to bring spices to the tomb.

So they get there. They see the angel after feeling an earthquake. And the angel says to them - first of all, I think this is a requirement of all angels - the first words out of any angel's mouth is, "Fear not." I think those are probably good words because if we really saw an angel, we may be a little nervous as well.

But the first words are, "Fear not." And this "fear not" is not just the fact that they saw the angel but "fear not" that your dreams of a Messiah have not died. Because, as the angel says right after that, "For I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here. He has risen." The angels know that the women are looking for Jesus. And the angels tell them that He is not here for He has risen. Do you remember a few months ago when the angels came to the shepherds and said to them, "I have good news for you. Fear not for today is born the Savior." And the shepherds went to look for them and they found Him. The angels come today looking again for Jesus but He is not here for He has risen. And then it says this... this little phrase, "Just as He said."

Oh, how often we forget what Christ says. But the angels remind the women here that when Christ says something, He will accomplish it. So when Christ said to the women before and to the disciples, "I am going to die and three days later I will rise again," He accomplished it. Now anyone who says I'm going to die and then come back from the dead on my own and can accomplish that has got to be God. And the angels are saying to the women, "Remember what he said. He said he would rise and He did." But just to prove it to you, there's that next line, "Come and see the place where he lay."

Do you remember what the angels told the shepherds and how they would notice who baby Jesus was? He would be wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. The women now come to the tomb expecting to see Jesus wrapped in linen and lying in the tomb... except all that's there is the linen.

We read in John that the angels showed him there was a cloth that was wrapped around Jesus laying there. And so now the women see with their own eyes that the cloth which was wrapped around Jesus which they had seen is there, but Jesus is not. And the angels say to the women, "Look, here is evidence that Jesus is alive." Then the angel instructs them this way, "Then go quickly and tell His disciples." Go quickly. Do not meander. It's Sunday morning. Don't say, "Oh, this can wait till Monday. Go quickly."

Do you remember what the shepherds did after they heard the news? It says they hurried off to Bethlehem to see what had been told them. Then the angel says, "Go quickly." This is important. "You need to do this right away because if you don't, chances are you won't." So the women leave. And what the angels had told them to tell the disciples was, #1 He is risen, and #2 Meet me in Galilee. Those are my instructions. So the women leave. It says, "As they hurried away from the tomb," in verse eight, "afraid but filled with joy." And they were afraid.

And you're thinking, "I understand the joy part." Right? Jesus is alive. It's awesome. Why would I be afraid? You have to understand the predicament they were in. At that time in history, the telling of truth or a story from a woman's perspective was not validated. In fact, a woman could not be a witness in court. And so part of their fear is going back and saying to the disciples, "Hey, guess what? Jesus rose," and the disciples saying, "Come on, woman. Quit making up stories. We all saw him die." How are they going to convince the disciples?

Now here's the beautiful part of this piece. It says right after that, "Suddenly Jesus met them." Jesus understood exactly what was going on in their minds. Jesus understood their fear of, "How are we going to convince them? Am I sure I want to do this? Maybe I should just wait a little bit. Maybe I should say, "Hey guys, I heard that the stones rolled away. Why don't you go check it out?" And Jesus says as He gets there, "Greetings." Now this term "greetings" in Greek is "(ky-ro)." (don't know spelling) (ky-ro) is used in many different ways within the New Testament. Sometimes it's translated as "hail." Like, "Hold on, stop. Whoa."

But it's also translated as, "Rejoice." And if you look at it, I think it's in the New King James, they actually use the word, "rejoice" as Jesus' greeting in this piece. Because Jesus is saying, "Women, I'm here. Rejoice with me. I'm with you. I will be with you throughout this piece." And He comes to them and His words are, "Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid to do what I have told you to do. Why? Because I will meet you there. I will be in that space with you when you are called to do it." Then He repeats the instructions. "Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee and there they will see me." But notice a term he uses. The angels say, "Go and tell my disciples." Jesus says, "Go and tell my brothers."

There is a shift now in relationship between Jesus and the disciples. There is a shift in our relationship between us and God. Because when Jesus died on the cross and rose from the grave, He made that shift into which we now become adopted as children of God. As children of God, we now become adopted brothers and sisters of Christ. And so when Jesus says to the women, "Go and tell my brothers," He is saying to the disciples who abandoned Him, "I will not abandon you. I am your brother."

So the women leave and now there is this third conversation which we read. It says, "While the women were off going, some of the guards - probably some of the guards who felt the earthquake, saw the angel and were just terrified - went to the chief priests, because they have a problem." On Friday, they thought they got the best duty of the weekend. What could be more work than standing by a grave making sure the stone doesn't move? That's going to take a lot of work, huh? [Congregation quietly laughing.]

We'll just sit here and have a good time. We'll chat, wait for time to go by and get paid overtime. This is good. Sunday morning arrives and suddenly life is not so pleasant. There's an earthquake, an angel comes and rolls the stone away. And that body that they were supposed to be guarding which was dead now walks by them. [Congregation quietly laughing.]

Oh. We have a problem. Because on that tomb was a seal and that seal basically said, "Anybody who allows this tomb to be open will be killed." "Oh, we're in trouble." I can't go to my head guards because he'll just say, "You're dead." So I'm gonna go to the chief priests because they kind of set it up in the beginning and we'll see what they say. So they go to the chief priests and they explain to the chief priest everything that happened. They explain the earthquake. They explain the angel coming down. They explain the women being there. And the chief priests are going, "Uh oh, we have a problem."

Because this Jesus who we crucified - one of the things that we claimed was a testimony of blasphemy was when he said, 'I'm going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days again' - and it's day three. He's alive. We have a problem." And so they come up with this theory. The theory is, "If we say to the guards, 'Tell everyone that you took a nap'... and I know you're not supposed to... but just pretend you took a nap. And while you were sleeping, the disciples came, rolled the stone away and took the body. And that's what happened." First of all, if you think about that, these would be the same disciples who, when Jesus was alive and Roman soldiers came, they all left and fled.

Can you imagine those same scared bunch of disciples coming in the middle of the night knowing that there are soldiers there going, "Hey, let's just sneak in here and steal the body." But that is the lie which they were told to tell. And just to make sure that they would tell that lie, they paid them a large sum of money. Now the soldiers had a choice to make. They saw what happened. They know what happened. They also thought, "You know, I could use a little extra money. The pay isn't that great. What difference does it make to me?" So they took the money and they started spreading that rumor.

And the chief priests said to them, "Don't worry about your guards or your officers. If it gets back to them, we will make it right. And we'll take care of it for you." So they did. They took on a new story that the world was telling them. Three conversations that happened on that first Easter. Sometimes I wonder if when we think about Easter we think about, "Jesus is alive; therefore, I have eternal life and I'm set."

But today, God's Word tells us Jesus is alive not just for eternal life. Jesus is alive for today. For you and me today. Let's quickly go back through those three conversations. When the angel said to the women, "Fear not. He's not here. He is risen. Just as He said." How often do we go about life going, "I'm not sure Jesus is here. I'm not sure Jesus really is alive." And the angel says to us today, "He is not here being in the tomb. He is risen." And after Jesus ascended and the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, Jesus says, "I am with you always." So when you say, "He is not here," you're right. He's not in the tomb. But He is here. He is within us all. And He has risen.

Then remember those important words that happened just afterwards, "Just as he said." And what did He say? Here it is. [Pastor John holds up bible.] This is what he has said. Jesus is with us each day and when we want to hear what Jesus said and what his promises are, they are right here. [Pastor John holds up the bible.] You can read them anytime. Jesus is the Word and the Word became flesh to dwell among us and to make it so that we may be in communion with the Father.

So when the angel said to the women, "He is not here," we too can say, "He is not in a grave someplace. He has risen." And we can live by the promises that He said. If He said it in Scripture, you know it's true. But then notice what the angels did. The angels said, "Come and see where he layed." If you look around you within your life, you will see evidence of a risen Savior.

If you allow your eyes to be open and you allow yourself to see what God is doing, you will see evidence of a risen Savior. You can hear it in His Word. You can see evidence around us.

But then there's another piece to this piece. The angel says, "Go quickly and tell His disciples." Jesus says, "Go quickly and tell my brothers." Go quickly. We have the living Word. How quickly do we tell our brothers and sisters and sons and daughters and fathers and mothers and aunts and uncles and everyone else in your family? How quickly do we tell them about what God is doing and that Jesus has risen? Do we spend our time talking about that? Remember, Jesus said "You are now my brothers."

In Romans eight, we read about how we have been adopted and we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. We need to be sharing with each other God's Word. We need to be sharing with each other the evidence of how we have seen God at work and we need to make that part of our lives. And for those times where we might think, "Oh, that is way too challenging, that will be a little awkward," God says, "Go quickly and do it. And while you are on your way, I will meet you." I will say, "Rejoice with me," because He has risen and we can celebrate that.

But then there was a third conversation. That third conversation went something like this, "I know that you're alive Jesus, but I also know what the world offers. And I kind of like it." Now I have a choice. I can invest myself in the kingdom of God or I can invest myself in the world. The world will get payoff but the world's payoff won't last.

So we have that place of the soldiers who says in their ideas, "I'm going to choose the world instead of the Word." So from that third conversation, we ask the question, "Where are we going to invest? Where are we going to put our money? Where are we going to put our efforts? Where are we going to put our focus? Are we going to focus on what the world says? The lies which come out of the world? Or are we going to focus on the Word and the truth of what the Word says?"

Many mornings, I wake up with a song in my head and the Lord often wakes me up with hymns. This Easter morning, I woke up humming the song, "He Lives."

I serve a risen Saviour, He's in the world today
I know that He is living, whatever men may say
I see His hand of mercy, I hear His voice of cheer
And just the time I need Him He's always near

In all the world around me I see His loving care
And though my heart grows weary I never will despair
I know that He is leading, through all the stormy blast
The day of His appearing will come at last

Rejoice, rejoice, O Christian Lift up your voice and sing
Eternal hallelujahs to Jesus Christ, the King
The Hope of all who seek Him, the Help of all who find

None other is so loving, so good and kind

Then there's the chorus...

[Pastor John and congregation members who know the words start singing]

He lives (He lives), He lives (He lives), Christ Jesus lives today

He walks with me and talks with me

Along life's narrow way

He lives (He lives), He lives (He lives), Salvation to impart

You ask me how I know He lives?

He lives within my heart

Now go quickly and tell those you love about the love of Christ which is in your heart and Jesus will meet you on the way. Amen.

Transcribed by: *Liza Perry* 