

Year A, Easter and Easter Vigil

April 16, 2017

† In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN

Do you remember where you were during the Great Earthquake of 2011? It's hard to forget something like that, isn't it? That 30 seconds of ground shaking was frightening and, at the same time, kind of exhilarating, wasn't it? And when the earth shakes under your feet, you get a real sense of your place in creation...you *know* that there are things in the universe far more powerful than us.

In Matthew's Gospel, earthquakes are a sign that something outside our realm of existence has happened, and there are earthquakes in both the crucifixion and the resurrection stories. Matthew tells us that on the day of Resurrection an Angel rolled the stone away from Jesus' tomb, causing the ground to quake. And at the very moment of Jesus' death two days earlier, Matthew tells us that the earth shook and the rocks were split.

A few years back the German Research Center for Geosciences in Potsdam did some research and found that, in fact, there had been a "seismic event" in Israel sometime between the years 26 and 36 AD. Exciting news, isn't it?

Actually, that doesn't really prove anything – it's kind of like saying, "there will most likely be heavy traffic on Columbia Pike this Wednesday afternoon at 4:30." Earthquakes happen. And, honestly, I don't need researchers and science, God forbid, to convince me of the reality of the resurrection. And whether science backs up the claim or not, Matthew wants us to know that something extraordinary happened at a specific point in time, and not just once, but twice. Extraordinary events that changed history.

The guards at the tomb were terrified, we read, when the angel appeared and did his strongman act of rolling away the stone, and in the midst of all this is are two women...

Mary Magdalene, and the rather unfortunately named, “Other Mary.” But it’s these two women who stood with others as silent witnesses to humanity’s depravity at the foot of the cross...these same women who watched as the tomb was closed up by the great stone...these same women who feel the earth shake, and we know what that feels like...these women now come face to face with a radiant, heavenly creature who proclaims, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised...”¹

It is these same women who fall at the feet of our Risen Lord, and it is these two women who now race home with a message that will change the world.

There was no doubt: with or without the benefit of an earthquake, they believed, because they saw the Risen Lord.

Mary Magdalene believed. Mary and “the other Mary” were the first witnesses of the most powerful miracle for all of humanity. Mary Magdalene, one of the many people Jesus healed...Mary Magdalene, scripture says once possessed by seven demons, now cured, whole, and healthy...now a loving disciple of Jesus.

Mary Magdalene, changed through her first encounter with Jesus, now shouting with joy to the disciples...and all who would listen of her encounter with Jesus... “Christ is risen! I have seen the Lord.”

Like Mary, we are a people who live by faith in something that cannot be seen, may not be understood, can’t be proved, but is certainly believed. The earthquake announced to the

¹ Matthew 28:5-6

world that Jesus threw off his burial shroud and the stone covering his tomb was rolled away.

The earthquake announced to the world that by his death Jesus trampled death for us all.

Today we celebrate Christ's victory over death because his victory is our victory. 19th C Episcopal bishop, Philips Brooks wrote, "Let every man and woman count himself immortal. Let him catch the revelation of Jesus in his resurrection. Let him say not merely, 'Christ is risen,' but 'I shall rise.'" With those words comes the hope that makes us Christians. This *is the* day when the earth shook, the tomb was opened, and our Lord gave us hope, for Christ is risen, indeed.

Alleluia.

AMEN

Ad maiorem Dei gloriam