

May the reading of your Word sanctify us in the truth and bring us to perfect joy. Amen.

Psalm 23

A psalm of David.

¹ The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,

³ he refreshes my soul.

He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk
through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.

Jesus Has Risen

28 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 Great Commission

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.

¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

History – his story – the record of human life is centered on the activity of men, the male of the species. In the centuries of the Old and New Testaments Two books are named after women – Ruth and Esther. Most women recorded are spouses. Few hold power. Women do not have status in the gospel period of Judean history. It is only in the last century that women's stories have been sought and told as the focus of the activity of the human race. Herstory – her story – must be sought in the details of what has been written.

Merriam-Webster tells us a witness is one that gives evidence; one asked to be present at a transaction so as to be able to testify to its having taken place; one who has personal knowledge of something. When you look at the Greek the word witness is martyr. One witness can distort an account, but two witnesses establish a fact. Today martyr is one who witnesses with the sacrifice of their life, but in the New Testament a martyr is one who tells the story.

Women take care of the details. They take care of the dirt. Dealing with a body will make them unclean. There will be time consumed in returning to ritual cleanliness. There will be steps that need to be taken before these women will be able to participate in religious rites. In this story, in this gospel the women seek to take care of the bodies and become the central witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Matthew's Gospel Story

At the crucifixion Matthew tells us of the presence of Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. As Jesus was placed in the tomb provided by Joseph of Arimethea and the stone placed in front of the tomb, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary watched. Pilate placed guards around the tomb to secure it.

So here in the Gospel of Matthew it is Sunday morning after the crucifixion of Jesus. Who is present? Mary Magdalene and the other Mary previously identified as Mary, the mother of James and Joseph.

So here they come to take care of the body of Jesus. It is a job that makes them unclean, but they come to do it anyway. Being spiritually unclean means they will be separated from the community until they go through the process of being "cleansed". That takes time. It is not a task that men as the hierarchy of the community stands, would take on.

But that is not the reason. The men are not around. Jesus left them and they left Jesus. The disciples, the eleven who are left, are not here. They are not looking for Jesus. They are not looking for the care of Jesus' body. They are gone. It is the women who wait. It is the women who watch. It is the women who remain. It is the women who have been witnesses to the entire process of the crucifixion and the burial. It is the women who will first learn of the resurrection.

There was a violent earthquake. We've not experienced a violent earthquake in this area. There have been earthquakes that give you pause and have you asking, "What was that?" There have been explosions – the fire that exploded on Donald Drive, the gas tanks hit by lightning at Winton and Route 4 – but those were minor. Violent. You don't keep going.

Here is an opening between the worlds of heaven and earth, an opening between the world of God and the world of man. An angel appears, rolls back the stone and sits on it. His appearance is like lightning – stunningly bright, blindingly bright. His clothes were white as snow.

The guards sent by Pilate pass out. The best the Roman Empire has, shake and faint.

Who withstands all of this commotion? The women. They are the ones who hear the angel's words of comfort. "Do not be afraid." They stand firm. Are they sure of what is happening? No. The angel continues, "He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. 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." These women stand strong and these women are the witnesses.

Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James and Joseph, are not easily led. They are still afraid. But they are filled with joy. Wow! How can you be both at the same time? Anyone would be shaken with the lightning and tremors that have happened. But could it be??? Could Jesus truly be alive? They leave the area of the tomb. Will they tell the disciples?

"Greetings." They stop. Can they believe their ears? Can they believe their eyes? It is Jesus. He has met them along the way. Just as any heavenly being would leave a person alarmed, Jesus finds he needs to comfort them, "Do not be afraid." Oh. It *is* Jesus! "Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

This is where the Easter story leaves us. But there is more. We need to look at what Jesus says when he meets the eleven disciples in Galilee.

The Great Commission

Here in our story the men finally show up. They see Jesus. They worship Jesus, but some are not so sure. Matthew does not separate Thomas from the crowd. Some doubted. It wasn't just Thomas. So there is no real reason to single him out for Matthew. The question is, 'What now?'

Jesus gives the disciples their marching orders. Jesus has the authority – all the authority of heaven and earth. "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

The question is: Are you a witness of the faith? Are you a witness to the resurrection? Do you carry on the task that God gave Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph? Do you go and tell that Jesus is risen? Do you live a life obedient to the commands of Jesus? Do you tell others that here at Trinity you can become a disciple of Jesus Christ?

You don't do these things alone, for Jesus is with you always.

Prayers of the People

Risen Christ,

May we who in baptism die to sin,

Rise again to new life

And find our place in your living body,

May the new covenant sealed in your blood

Bring healing and reconciliation to this wounded world.

Alleluia. You are risen.

We are risen with you.

Praise and glory to the God.

OR

Great and loving God,

Your will for us in Jesus

Is the peace which the world cannot give;

Your abiding gift

Is the Advocate he promised.

Calm all troubled hearts,

Dispel every fear.

Keep us steadfast in love

And faithful to your word,

That we may always be your dwelling place.

Grant this through Jesus Christ, the firstborn from the dead,

Who lives with you now and always in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

God forever and ever. Amen.

Charge and Benediction: Go. Be a witness. Tell of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Tell of the work we do here at Trinity. May the grace of the lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Alleluia!

OT: Psalm 23

NT: Matthew 28:1-10; 16-20

Sermon:

Witnesses

Introit 324	For All the Faithful Women
Opening Hymn	I Lift Your Name on High
Hymn 233	The Day of Resurrection
Closing Hymn 462	I Love to Tell the Story

No scientific theory touches on the mysteries that the religious tradition addresses. A man asking why his days are short . . . is not disposed to turn to algebraic quantum field theory for the answer. The answers that prominent scientific figures have offered are remarkable in their shallowness. That we are nothing more than cosmic accidents has been widely accepted by the scientific community.

The Devil's Delusion

David Berlinski