

Easter Sunday Sermon Notes

Matthew 28:1-10, 19-20

April 12, 2020

Toward the end of Jesus' ministry on earth, he had come to be seen more and more as a threat to the religious establishment and a nuisance or threat to the Roman government; so, the leaders from both of these groups conspired together to make an example of Jesus - a rabble-rousing rabbi.

They arranged to have Jesus arrested, put him through a mock trial and sentenced him to death - but only the Romans could execute a person, so they took him to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. When Pilate listened to the outcries of the people to crucify Jesus, he finally conceded to their wishes. Jesus was then publicly crucified on the outskirts of Jerusalem on a hill called Mount Calvary. Crucifixion happened on that Friday. Many had forgotten Jesus' words that he would rise from the dead in three days.

Here's where our gospel lesson picks-up today in Matthew 28:1-10. On that Sunday morning some women went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' dead body with spices - this was a symbol of love, respect, and devotion - somewhat similar to us today sending flowers to the funeral service or putting them on the gravesite.

Roman guards were watching Jesus' tomb. Pilate and the religious leaders were concerned that Jesus' followers might try to steal his body in the night. But while the Roman soldiers were guarding the tomb, there was an earthquake, a rumbling of the ground. An angel appeared - shining so brightly - the guards fainted in fear. The stone was rolled away from Jesus' tomb (whether by the earthquake or the angel). The angel spoke to the women who had come to anoint Jesus' body - "Do not be afraid. I know you are seeking Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; he has been raised from the dead. Come and see where He lay. Go and tell his disciples that He will see them in Galilee and He will go ahead of them."

As the women went in fear and in joy, Jesus appeared to them - “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers (the disciples) to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

I want us to see several important things in this gospel lesson:

1. **The women were filled that day with fear and joy.** How often do we experience situations where we feel both “fear and joy”? Think for example - when you’re having a baby for the first time. Isn’t there both fear and anxiety of having and taking care of that child and yet such great joy of a baby and what it brings into your lives?

What about the fear and joy you feel at moving out of town for the first time on your own, or starting a new job, or going to a new school, etc.? Don’t we have fear and anxiety about fitting in, doing a good job and yet much joy at the newness of this new job and what it means for us financially and vocationally?

Those women at the tomb felt great fear - is it really Jesus? Is this happening in front of our own eyes? Wouldn’t you be fearful if you heard an earthquake, watched the stone roll away from the tomb of a dead man and see that formerly deceased person alive? And yet, there was immense joy - their sorrow at Jesus’ crucifixion and death had transformed to joy - “He is alive!”

Today, we are experiencing fear - fear of getting this virus, fear of losing our job and our income, fear of losing a loved one to the virus, etc. But the story of Jesus’ resurrection reminds us that even in spite of the women’s fears, they acted in faith and went to tell Jesus’ disciples. Jesus calls us today to think and act in faith, even though we feel fear and anxiety. Jesus is asking us to trust Him in spite of our fears.

2. Secondly, I want you to notice that **Jesus gives us a message to share.** In our gospel lesson, Jesus gave the women a message - “go and tell my disciples that I will meet them in Galilee” and then at

the end of Matthew 28, Jesus Himself gave the Great Commission to his disciples (Matthew 28:19-20) - "Go ye therefore to all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

I heard a story recently about a 12-year-old boy named Jeff, who accidentally broke a window in his neighbor's home while playing baseball with a friend. The boys looked around to see if anyone was watching. The only witness was Jeff's younger 10-year-old brother. Jeff told his brother, "keep quiet about this and I'll give you some candy." The younger brother told Jeff he didn't want any candy. Jeff said, "keep quiet and I'll give you my baseball." "I don't want your baseball," his brother said. Jeff proceeds to offer his baseball bat, new glove, and his baseball hat. His younger brother rejects all the gifts he offered. Jeff asked, "what is it you want?" The younger brother proceeds to say: "I just want to tell what you did!"

That little brother had some great information and he didn't want to be quiet about it. That's the way we should be as Christians. We have some great news to tell and the world desperately needs to hear it - Jesus is alive! He won the victory of life after death. He has the power over sin and death. Darkness surrounded the world at Jesus' death, but the light (Jesus) shined in the darkness and hope and life were resurrected. Even in the darkness of this coronavirus pandemic, the light of Christ shines. We are bearers of the light. *May Christ's light and hope shine through us.*

3. Lastly, I want you to notice something else in this story - **Rely on God's promises**. One of Jesus' names is Emmanuel - meaning "God with us". At the end of the Matthew account, the resurrected Jesus appears to his disciples again and He commissions them to be His witnesses and He gives them a promise - "I will be with you always, even to the end of the ages."

No matter what you and I face, God is with us. Jesus said, "I am with you always." There is nothing too difficult for you to face when God is with you.

Through all that is going on in our world right now with the coronavirus - may you remember:

1. "God is with you."
2. Don't be afraid - He will see you through. *Jesus calls us to choose to think and act in faith - even when what we feel is fear and anxiety.*
3. Live out your faith in the resurrected Lord in this critical time -- Christ is our hope and our strength. He can transform sorrow to joy, despair to hope. He is the light in the darkness.

Christ is Risen! The light shineth in the darkness and hope springs forth! Hallelujah!