

## Sermon Notes – April 4, 2021 (Easter Sunday)

Matthew 28:1-10

I heard an interesting story that book author and Pastor, Max Lucado told -- it was about a doctor in Arkansas who misdiagnosed a woman's situation and pronounced her dead. He had already informed the family and the family was shocked and grief-stricken. But the nurse went back in to bathe her and get her ready for the funeral home, and she found the woman breathing and alive. She went and informed the doctor saying, "Doctor, I think you better go and tell the family that the woman is alive." The doctor is embarrassed, shocked, and a little reluctant, but finally he calls the husband. He says, "Sir, I need to talk to you about the condition of your wife." The husband says, "What do you mean the condition of my wife? You already told me that she's dead." The doctor said, "Sir, there's been a slight improvement." Understatement, right? Most of the time when we say somebody is dead, they are dead - aren't they?

Then I heard a true story about a Pastor in Houston, Texas who was traveling with a Funeral Director to do to a burial (of one of his church members) that was an hour and a half away from his church. He asked the Funeral Director if he could ride with him because he wasn't feeling well - he didn't feel like driving. So, he got in the hearse with him; they went to this cemetery, and the Pastor did the service. The Pastor started feeling worse and he told the Director, "I don't know if I have a cold or am coming down with the flu, but I've got a headache, my stomach hurts, and I'm beginning to ache all over. Do you mind if I lay in the back of the hearse?" The Director said, "Yeah, that's okay. The curtains are pulled and nobody is going to see you. It's a long way back. If you want to go to sleep and rest, I'll wake you up when we get back to the church." The Pastor laid down in the back and fell asleep. He didn't know that the Funeral Director was going to stop and get gas for the hearse. (*This story was back-in-the-day when attendants used to come out and put the gas in the vehicle for you.*) The Funeral Director went into the gas station to get a bottle of water. While he was gone, the Pastor in the back of the hearse woke up. He sat up straight, pulled the curtain, looked out, and he was looking face-to-face at the gas attendant. The gas attendant dropped the gas nozzle, turned white as a sheet, eyes got as big as saucers, took off

running, fell three times, and wet his pants all before the Funeral Director could tell him what had happened. Not the kind of surprise that gas station attendant expected that day, right?

Sometimes God has a way of surprising us too, doesn't he? There were some women who went to the tomb on Sunday and they were expecting to find Jesus' deceased body in a tomb. They were going to anoint his body with spices and oils. When they got there, the stone was rolled away. One of the gospel lessons says that the angel was sitting on the stone - another says an angel or two angels were in the tomb. All these women knew was that the stone had been rolled away. They had gone that morning grieving the loss of Jesus. They had gone fearful that the Roman soldiers would harass them as women. They went worried - "how in the world are we going to roll that big stone so that we can anoint his body?" But they got there and found that the stone was rolled away. They looked in and they didn't know if Jesus' body had been stolen or what had happened. ***But, I want you to know that wasn't the primary evidence of his resurrection -- it was when they saw his physical bodily resurrection - when they saw Jesus and heard him call them by name.*** They went in that tomb and the angel said, "Go ahead and see where he lay. He's not here - the one you're seeking. He's risen. He said to tell you to go tell his disciples that he will go ahead of them in Galilee and there you will see him." They are fearful, joyful, and they start running off. Now, have you ever had something that you're kind of afraid that it might not be true, but you're joyful, hoping it's going to be true? They left in fear and they left in joy. Along the way, Jesus met them on the path. He says, "Mary." In one of the gospels, it said he said, "Greetings." Another way of saying that is "Hail" - meaning "rejoice" or "hello." Then he called Mary by name. Mary fell at his feet to worship him. She recognized his voice, she saw his body, and she recognized him. Again he said, "Go tell my disciples. I'll meet them in Galilee and there they'll see me."

I want you to notice several things in that story. **It wasn't the empty tomb that proved the resurrection for those women and for Peter and John. It was the bodily resurrection of Jesus that proved it.** They saw him; he appeared to them; and as you read the scriptures, you will find

out that he appeared to the disciples in Jerusalem (even though he said, “I’ll meet you in Galilee”). They were so afraid that they didn’t leave Jerusalem. They stayed in that upper room. Have you ever gone through a deep loss yourself and you grieve so much that you kind of withdraw and pull back from people? That’s kind of what the disciples did. They pulled back from everybody else and they stayed in that upper room. They were afraid of the Romans, but they were also grieving deeply. They stayed in Jerusalem and Jesus came to them behind locked doors. Then, they met him in Galilee and they saw him again in Jerusalem before he ascended to the Father. They saw Jesus in a physical body form and they recognized him. Do you know that the resurrected Jesus appeared to over 500 different people? That is a historical fact. It was his resurrection that gave them proof to others - the women and his disciples.

***Then, I want you to notice that Jesus gave the women the task of going to tell the disciples.*** They were the first ones to see him. Isn’t that rather odd? In their society, women had no status. They were things and objects. Children and women were like slaves - they were just a “thing” - they didn’t count as a person. And yet, Jesus appeared to the women first and he told them, “Go tell my disciples.” Guess what happened in Luke’s gospel when they told the disciples? ... “Oh, that’s nonsense. Wishful thinking on the part of those women.” But, it was true. Jesus appeared to the women because he valued ALL people and he wanted us to know that. He appeared to them and had them go tell the disciples. Jesus values all people.

***And then, I want you to notice, not only was it not the empty tomb but the bodily resurrection that gave them proof, not only did he appear to the women, but the stone wasn’t rolled away to let Jesus out.*** Most people think that is why it was rolled away - there was an earthquake or the angel moved it to let Jesus out. Jesus had already resurrected. The stone was rolled away to let the women and the disciples (Peter and John) in. It wasn’t to let Jesus out, but to let those folks in to see that he wasn’t there anymore.

You look at the Easter story and you say, “What in the world does that have to do with you and me today?” I want to tell you several things that

it has to do with us. ***Number one, it shows us the nature of God, which is love and the depth of his love for us.*** In I John 1, it says, “This is love. Not that we love God first, but he loved us and gave himself as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” Jesus said to his disciples, “Greater love hath no man than this -- that a man lay down his life for his friends.” Easter resurrection shows us the nature of God and tells us the depth of that love for us. For God so loved the world, that he gave Jesus for you and me.

***Then it also assures us of God's forgiveness.*** You see, the Jews had been offering animals and lambs for the sacrifices for the forgiveness of their sins. Jesus told the disciples that he would offer himself as the Passover Lamb. He would be the lamb, the final sacrifice for the sins of all the world -- for all people -- and he would go to the cross, offer himself, and pay the price for our forgiveness. He was the atoning sacrifice. He paid for the forgiveness of our sins. So, when Christ died on Good Friday for our sins, he arose on Easter Sunday to assure us of his forgiveness.

I heard an interesting story from Pastor Jim Moore, who is a Methodist Minister in Houston, Texas. He tells a story – and I don’t know part of it, but it had to do with his Dad dying when he was twelve-years-old. I don’t know if his mother and father were divorced or what happened, but he had been with his Dad one day playing ball with him. He got mad at his Dad, threw the ball hard and wildly, and broke his Dad’s thumb. His Dad ended up having to go to the hospital, have surgery, have it bound up, but he still went to work the next day. The next day, that boy’s father was killed instantly in a car accident and he found out accidentally that his father had died before his mother could tell him. Somebody else blurted it out. He said, “I lived with guilt as a child that I had been angry at my Dad, broke his thumb, and the last image that my Dad had of me was of me being mad at him and breaking his thumb. I lived with that guilt. About six months later, my mother asked me to go talk to our Pastor, and I did. I went into the Pastor’s office, sat down, and told him why I had come to talk to him. He got up, walked around the desk, and sat in the chair right beside me. He looked me in the face and he said, ‘Jimmy, if your Dad could come back alive for five minutes and you could tell him how worried and upset you are about what you’d done to him, what do

you think your Dad would say? He'd say, 'Son, it's okay. I love you. I knew you were just mad. I forgive you.'"

That's what Jesus did for us on the cross. Remember when he was hanging on the cross and he said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do"? He forgave ALL the people that assaulted him, mocked him, put the crown of thorns on his head, stripped him of his clothing, those who crucified him, abandoned him, and betrayed him. And, he forgave us. On Good Friday, he died for our sins. On Easter Sunday, he rose to assure us of his forgiveness. "I love you, my child. I forgive you."

And then on Easter Sunday, Jesus was raised from the dead. It says that God has the last word. You know, Satan thought he had the last word that day. The Romans thought they had gotten rid of Jesus. They don't have to deal with this prospective king. The Jews didn't have to deal with him anymore. He was gone. He was in a tomb. Even his disciples are disappointed, disillusioned, in disbelief. "Here was our king that was going to overthrow Rome and put us back in power. Now we don't have anybody. What are we supposed to do?"

... And Jesus rose from the dead, proving that God has the last word. He has the power over death, sin, suffering, and evil. Can't you imagine God laughing that day at Satan? God has the last word. ***Resurrection gives us the promised hope of eternal life with God. It's a gift he offers to all of us who have faith in him and trust him. There's more to this life than just life itself and death.***

I assume Pastor Tom and others of us who are Ministers have had the experience of doing funerals for non-believers. If you've ever been to a funeral of a non-believer, and been exposed to a lot of people who have no faith in Jesus Christ, there's a void and an emptiness. There's a difference in being at one of those services and one of a Christian, where people know Jesus Christ and have hope of a promised resurrection. There is something to life after this life, and God has promised eternal life to all who trust in him, live for him, and believe in him. One day we will see him and all those who have gone before us. Hallelujah! Praise you, Lord! One day I will see Jesus, my Mom, and all of those who have gone before me - and so will you. There's more to this life than just that.

***Then I want you to notice that God took all the bad and the evil and transformed it into something good.*** Sometimes when you think your life is full of bad and you need hope, remember that the hope of Christ is always there to tell you that you will be okay. “I’m walking with you. This will pass and I’ll see you through it.” *Resurrection says that love trumped hate. Life trumps death. Hope replaced despair.* Most of all, this Easter I hope and pray that you’ll know how much God loves you. He forgives you and me. And he assures us that there is life after death – there’s the promised hope of resurrection to all who live and believe in him.

I heard a cute story about a little boy that had Down’s syndrome. He was in the second grade. There were four kids in the little, small country church in the second grade Sunday School class. The teacher told them the story of Easter. She read it and she gave each kid one of the big, plastic Easter eggs that preschoolers use. She said, “I want you to go outside in the church yard and I want you to find something that is living that reminds you of Easter and new life, put it in that Easter egg, close it up, bring it back in, and we’re going to share with the class.” So, each of the four kids went out, did their thing, came back in, and they started sharing. One little girl opened hers up and she had a butterfly in it. She said, “A butterfly is a symbol of Easter.” The teacher said, “That’s right. That’s good.” Another little girl had a little flower in hers and she said, “We always have flowers at Easter in the church. Flowers are living, so I brought a flower.” A little boy in the class said, “I brought a stone because it represents that big stone that covered Jesus’ tomb that was rolled away.” The fourth little boy, Philip with Down’s syndrome, opened his egg and it had nothing in it. The other kids started laughing and making fun of him, saying, “You cheated! You didn’t do it right! You were supposed to bring something back!” Philip said, “NO! That scripture said that the tomb was empty. He’s not there!” And the teacher said, “You’re exactly right, Philip. The tomb was empty. Christ is risen.”

May we go out this day to live resurrection faith -- the hope, the love, the forgiveness of God. Hallelujah! He’s risen! Amen.