***“There They Will See Me”*** by S. Finlan, at The First Church, Easter, April 12, 2020

**Matthew 28:1–10**

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. 2And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 4For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. 5But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. 6He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 7Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message for you.” 8So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.9Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. 10Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

This starts with the experience of the women, Mary Magdalene and another Mary, possibly the mother of the apostle, James the Lesser (maybe the person intended by Mark 16:1 and Luke 24:10). There is a sudden earthquake and they see the stone rolled back and a blazing angel sitting upon it. Already they’re probably terrified. The angel tells them “don’t be afraid.” Well that’s a good start, but I’m not sure it is enough to simply dispel the fear. The angel goes on, “Jesus is not here; he has been raised. Go in and see for yourselves, the place where he lay. Then go and tell the disciples that he has been raised from the dead.”

I don’t know what the women’s reaction was, but probably they are amazed, excited (when they see the empty tomb), but also bewildered by this strange visitation. The positive message raises their hopes, but they’re still going to feel unsettled. Their hearts are beating a mile a minute, they’re asking each other “did you see what I saw?” It’s such an unexpected experience that it is hard to really take it all in. But I think they get some clarity when they see Jesus for themselves, right after this. He appears to them, and their hearts swell up with hope, but probably with fear again. He greets them and they hurl themselves down at his feet to worship him. He gently tells them not to be afraid, and this has more effect than when the angel had said it. They *know* his voice, after all. So I am guessing they are able to take in his instructions, and to feel somewhat relieved by the whole experience. He tells them to go and tell his apostles to move on to Galilee, for there they will see him.

The male author gives us no hint of what the women’s reactions are, but I guess they are very intense. They are seeing something that has never been seen before. They would be somewhat confused and elated at the same time. Their hearts are warmed to know that he really *has* arisen, as he had promised. It brings a deep feeling of vindication to know that Goodness—not evil and cruelty—are having the last word.

If we add the report from John’s gospel, Mary Magdalene had her own separate conversation with Jesus, not recognizing him at first, but only after he speaks her name, “Mary,” and she turns and says “my teacher!” (John 20:16 NABRE footnote). I pick up more emotion in John’s story. I hear lots of affection in “*my* teacher”—not just anybody’s teacher, but *hers*!

Let us to try to put ourselves in the women’s place to imagine what it must have been like for them. Their hearts are bursting with joy, gratitude, and a feeling of triumph. Love and truth are stronger than death, after all! And he speaks comforting and energizing words, just as he always had. He’s going to comfort the men, too, but it is very interesting that his first two or three appearances are to the women, these women who came to clean and anoint his body as an act of respect, and probably of grieving. But instead of grief, they get filled with astonishment and joy. They come back to the men and share it, but the men put them off; they don’t even believe them (Luke 24:11).

What a strange reaction! The men are still wrapped up in their sorrow and fear, and they won’t even listen to the first-hand testimony that confirms Jesus’ promise. They don’t believe until they see him for themselves. Are they so used to feeling superior to women that they won’t even believe the women disciples? It doesn’t paint the men in a very favorable light. It is an embarrassing story, really. It is Luke who tells us that the men didn’t believe the women’s report. The author of Matthew actually dodges the whole issue, not mentioning how the men reacted to the women, but cutting to a story about the Jewish authorities, and then jumping to Jesus’ appearance to the male disciples in Galilee. We don’t know if the women witnessed that appearance or not, since the author cannot bring himself even to *mention* the women’s existence again. For him, it’s the *men* who count, “the eleven” (28:16), as he says. Even that piece of information reminds us of the less-than-perfect record among the male apostles. People are used to listening to recognized authorities, and it is the male leadership that is given authority.

But we know that Mary Magdalene and that other Mary are important leaders and witnesses in the movement. We know, from the Gospel of John, that Jesus’ friend Martha believed him when he asked her if she believed that he had the power to raise the dead (John 11:23–27). We know that Martha’s sister, Mary, was said to have “chosen the better part” when she sat at Jesus’ feet and listened (Luke 10:39, 42). And we know that the men who wrote the Gospels incorporated some part of these women’s experience, because they *had* to. It was a known part of the story.

We can be sure that *Jesus* cared about the women’s experience. He wanted to give them reassurance and support as quickly as he could, which happened to be *before* the men were ready for it. These women have a different kind of authority, the authority of first-hand experience, and the dignity of being the first witnesses of the Resurrection.

Jesus was revolutionary in the way he respected and uplifted women. In this sermon, I have given recognition to women believers, but I want to say that men and women are better when they work together. We are stronger together than our separate contributions added up. And humankind and God working together create even more possibilities. Are you ready to let Jesus work with you?