

Sermon on **Matthew 28:1-10** – Easter 2023
St. Paul's Lutheran – New Ulm, MN – Pastor N. Scharf

Jesus Christ was dead. They had killed him on the cross. Jesus gave up his spirit into his Father's hands. He finished the work of paying for the sins of the world. Joseph and Nicodemus placed him in the tomb and rolled the stone in front. The women expected to have their turn to care for the body of Jesus on Sunday morning. They had to make quick work of it before things got too bad. And when they went there, nothing was as they expected, or as they planned, and they were afraid. There are times we are met with uncertainty, trials, setbacks, powerful temptations, tragic events, even death, and many doubts. Nothing is as we hoped, or expected, or as we planned, but listen to the words of the angel this morning who said to the women and also to us:

Do not be afraid. He has risen, just as he said.

"After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. 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. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men."

The guards had been placed there for a reason. We read earlier in Matthew, *"the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. 'Sir,' they said, 'we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.'"* The disciples who had deserted Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane were hiding in a locked room. The women had been at the cross, and now they continued to have the guts and grace to go to care for Jesus' body the day after the Sabbath. Soldiers were placed there to ensure there would not be any funny business or lies being told about some resurrection. Funny that they would get to be the first witnesses. Just like at his death the earth shook as an angel came down. The soldiers did not speak like the Centurion, *"Surely he was the Son of God."* Instead they shook and were paralyzed with fear.

But to the women, *"The angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.'"* They had expected to find Jesus' dead body still dead, like most people's bodies after they die. Sure he raised Lazarus, Jairus' daughter, and the son of the widow at Nain, but the miracle worker was dead. They had their plan. They had their expectations in their grief. This is the way it works! The angel acknowledges as much, *"Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified."*

God knows just how we feel. He knows all that we go through. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. And this angel, a messenger sent by God, acknowledges what they are doing and what they expected. But they were wrong in their expectations. And they would learn to change their expectations when it comes to Jesus. And we do too. If there is a rebuke or a call to repentance in this word this morning, maybe it is this – to stop doubting, to stop letting ourselves be afraid so easily, or to fall to temptation so easily, or to doubt so quickly that trusting God's promises in Scripture will hang us out to dry and leave us in the dust in this world with no help. The women expected Jesus to still be dead. And the angel's answer to their fear, their doubt, their internal confusion, speaks to our hearts often confused, doubting and troubled, *"Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. 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.' Now I have told you."*

I know what you expected and often expect, but Jesus outperforms your expectations, and he is not limited, nor is he ever unaware of how you feel or what is going on. *He has risen, just as he said.* Jesus' resurrection is the reason you do not have to be afraid, really ever again. This is the Gospel comfort when we

find our hearts wanting to run to fear or doubt. *He has risen, just as he said.* This is the word we need to hear when our hearts justly condemn us for our sin and sinfulness or even unjustly try to drudge up sin and shame that has long been forgiven by God, He has risen, just as he said. He died for our sins, just as he said. He rose again, just as he said. Which means we are forgiven by God. Jesus' resurrection is proof that our sins are forgiven, and not even death can separate us from God's love. This is the Gospel comfort we need to hear when we are faced with walking the road of sin and this world or walking God's path which has crosses and difficulties. We have nothing to fear. Jesus lives. He knows. He has an answer. He is our answer. All God's promises to you and me are true. *"Do not be afraid...He is not here; he has risen."*

The angel invited them to double check the tomb. Yup, it's empty. Now with their schedules cleared. Don't need the spices anymore — maybe they left them in a sad heap along with all their sadness for they didn't need to be sad anymore either. The angel gives them a command sent by God. *"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.' Now I have told you."* The women were the first to hear the good news and got to be the first proclaimers to the disciples who deserted Jesus and needed to hear that he was alive. And it got better.

"So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples." Some residual fear remained as is common anytime you meet a holy angel of God, but they were filled with great joy and they set out to do their new task of proclaiming life, freedom and forgiveness.

"Suddenly Jesus met them. 'Greetings,' he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.'" Jesus appeared to the women who had come to bring spices to anoint his dead body, but he had risen. They did the most natural thing possible for a believer who hears, sees, and grasps with their hands the good news, the Word — Jesus Christ. They worshiped him, which is what we have come here to do as well. What comfort they had. What joy filled their hearts. Here was the answer to all their fear, doubt, despair. Jesus lives. Every promise he makes is sure. Every promise God has written in his Word for us we can hold him to with eager expectation of its fulfillment.

And what does Jesus say, *"Go and tell my brothers."* "My brothers?!?" The guys who are left, all of whom deserted you, and one who broke the biggest promise he had made and downright denied you? These guys? This is what the resurrection does. It proves God's forgiveness is real and he means it. The resurrection proves how much God loves us and accepts us through Jesus Christ as his own children. Jesus calls us "brothers." You and I are brothers and sisters of Jesus. That means we have a common father. Jesus even taught us to pray, "Our Father." That means we have a delightful inheritance. Well, Jesus taught us about that too, didn't he — *in my Father's house are many rooms...I am going there to prepare a place for you. I will come back.*

The tomb is empty, and so is our reasons for fear and doubt — emptied out. Christ is risen. And in our risen Lord our hope and confidence rises too, doesn't it, as we trust Jesus to walk with us through every shadow of death, as we trust God to sustain us in every trial and temptation, as we joy in sharing this confidence and joy we have, because Jesus lives. *Don't be afraid. He has risen just as he said.* And we will too. This is Easter. Christ is Risen. He is Risen indeed. Alleluia. Amen.