

**Oak Grove Presbyterian Church**  
**Rev. Dr. Bart Roush**  
**Easter Sunday, April 17, 2022**  
**Matthew 28:1–10**

Let us pray for an awareness of and inspiration from God’s Spirit.

O risen Christ, open us to the power of your resurrection as we hear it proclaimed this day. Enlighten our minds and kindle our hearts with the presence of your Spirit, that we may hear your words of comfort and challenge in the reading of the scriptures, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And 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. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then 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.” So, they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of 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.”

Christ is Risen! *Christ is risen indeed!* Alleluia!

A few years ago, shortly after the Notre Dame cathedral in Paris had caught fire, I read an essay that has stuck with me. This essay was personal and recalled and reflected on a conversation between a mom and her seven-year-old daughter.<sup>i</sup>

“Is this just going to keep happening?” the seven-year-old daughter asked. Her voice caught in her throat. Her eyes were tired from crying. She had had a hard day at school. “Is this just going to keep happening, hard things like this, through my whole life? Even when I’m grown up?”

The mother could just see the weight hover ominously over the daughter’s broken less-than-ten-year-old heart.

The mom reflected, “So many memories tripped through my mind as I wrapped her little body up in the umpteenth hug of the day. Memories from each of the four decades of my life. Memories of when I had been hurt. Memories of when I had hurt others. And then my head and heart expanded to burning churches and political corruption and famine and war. Right behind or braided in with these memories and thoughts...”

The mom continued...

“Part of me just wanted to sit with her in the pain and the lament of it all. Part of me just wanted to say, “Yes. It’s just going to keep happening. It never stops. Even when you are a grown up like me. Hard things keep happening.”

She wrote in the essay, “And I *did* say that...But I kept going... This was a “Yes, *and*...” moment. “Yes, it’s going to keep happening, *and* I believe and trust that we learn in and from the things that happen to us. And we learn in and from the things that we do to others. God is with us in those things, and when we are open to learning from God, God grows us and helps us not to make the same mistakes again. I think you are going to learn from this.”

In thinking about the comfort and advice this mom gave her seven-year-old daughter, she worried that she jumped too quickly to the learning, to the hope. And at the same time, this mom said she wants her daughter, “to grow up believing in the power and possibility of transformation. I do want her to grow up knowing that even though outwardly, we are all wasting away, decade by decade; hard thing by hard thing, inwardly, we are being renewed day by day.”

How much of our lives are exactly this, the mixture of hard and hope?

How much the Easter story from Matthew tells this tale, this mixture of dread and promise, of fear and hope, of trepidation and transformation?

It quite literally starts with a bang, or at least an earthquake. When the women arrive at the tomb, the earth shakes, this has occurred before, just a chapter before in the Gospel of Matthew when Jesus had “breathed his last.” Matthew, with his supernatural earth-shaking moments wants us to be clear about the significance of Jesus’ death and resurrection. As Pastor Erica mentioned last week, this earthquake, and the earth-shattering at Jesus’ death, are the same word used to talk about the city of Jerusalem being in turmoil last week in the scriptures read on Palm Sunday. This is no accident. This is not normal. This is foundation-shaking stuff that is taking place. The world is shifting under our feet.

I imagine that this feeling might be both exciting and terrifying to the women. And if that isn’t enough, an angel appears, with an appearance like lightning, and clothes like snow and, thankfully, the angel does what all angels do in scripture, and tells the women not to fear.

But there are other witnesses in this story. There are the guards, who although they must have heard the angels say, “Do not fear,” they are frozen in fear, as if they are dead. Unable to speak, unable to move.

This dead-like state is in complete contrast to what has happened at this tomb, this empty tomb that has given new life.

The angel tells the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here;... He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.”

We’re then told the women leave quickly with “fear and great joy.”

And I love this, what a contrast from the guards.

Where the guards are immobilized by their fear, where it is as if they are dead. The women move quickly and go, not because there is an absence of fear, we are told they are afraid, but they also have great joy!

The resurrection doesn’t tie everything up in a nice neat bow for the women, I imagine that they uttered to one another a few short days ago, “will stuff like this keep happening, hard things like this?” there is still uncertainty and doubt perhaps, but when they receive the news, the confirmation from the angel, that Jesus is not at the tomb because he has been resurrected as he said he would, their joy can override, or at the very least sit alongside, their fear.

This great joy, intermixed with their fear is what allows them not to be stock still, but rather it allows them to go quickly to tell the good news. They are galvanized. They are off, fear in one foot, and great joy in the other. Dread falling behind as they go, exhilaration filling their lungs as they move forward.

As they are on their way, their hopes are met when Jesus greets them.

In this story Jesus meets them when they are on the way, when they are doing the thing the angel has called them to do. The resurrection has moved away from the tomb and out into the world. The resurrected Jesus

is the one we encounter when we have come and seen and then when we go out to tell.

Jesus, as the angel told us, was ahead of them.

“He has been raised. He is not here. He has gone ahead”

God is always ahead of us.

God is always ahead, always rolling back stones before we get there, preparing the way for us, threatening us with resurrection.

Jesus goes ahead to continue calling disciples, exorcizing unclean spirits, removing fevers, cleansing lepers, healing paralytics and withered hands, stilling storms, stopping women from bleeding to death, healing children, and feeding thousands of people.

God is not in the historic past, locked into an ancient story. Nor is God shut up in our personal past, along with our failures, our wasted opportunities.

No. God is ahead of us, in our future, in the moving and doing, in the proclaiming of resurrection even in the face of grief and fear.

Jesus waits for us, up ahead, waits for us to get moving, to catch up to him. God waits for us, up ahead, waits for us to get moving, to catch up to what God is doing.

The central question of Easter is not “What happened to Jesus way back then?” but rather, “Where is Jesus now, for us?” Easter is not a matter of our questioning the resurrection but of allowing the resurrection to question us. Who are we now, and what must we become, in the light of the risen Christ?

The resurrection, although breaking into history at a specific time and in a specific place, is not the property of the past. As God's future showing itself in our present, it belongs to all times and seasons. Jesus is alive, still showing up as a transfiguring presence in a world fraught with absences. Jesus is not over, and his story is not over.

Easter isn't something we remember. It's something we live and breathe. We are an Easter people. A people re-born and resurrected.

Resurrection has consequences. The resurrection is more than an idea we talk about or believe propositionally. It's something we are, and we become.

Our lives are a testimony to the risen-ness of Jesus; we demonstrate that Jesus is not dead by living a life in which Jesus is the never-failing source of affirmation, challenge, enrichment, and enlargement. Even in the midst of hard things.

Resurrection is about the healing and restoration of wounded and severed relationships; resurrection is about dismantling oppressive and unjust structures and systems; resurrection is proclaiming joy even in the midst of grief. Resurrection is about possibility and imagination.

Resurrection is about the beginning of the transfiguration and transformation of the world.

On this Sunday, and in the days ahead, when we hear about the hard things, as we hear of bombings and deaths, shootings and violence, as we confront uncertainty, as we face our fears and our grief, we are also called to witness, to go, to proclaim, to move with great joy into the resurrection.

We have heard the confirmation, Jesus is not in the tomb, he is risen, he is resurrected. This is the good news. This is the joy that can override, or even just sit alongside the fear we may have.

May we, like the women who first heard the news, go to meet the one ahead of us already. Let us go and tell the good news. Even if it is with fear in one foot, and great joy in the other.

Christ is Risen! *Christ is risen indeed!* Alleluia!

Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Heidi DeJonge, <https://blog.reformedjournal.com/2019/04/17/grown-up/>