

“The Day That Changed the World”      Matt. 28:1-10      4/1/18

As I prepared for this morning, I wondered, “When was the last time that Easter landed on April Fools Day?” (We pastors wonder about these kinds of things.) It turns out that the last time Easter landed on April 1 was... in 1956! It will happen again in 2029 and then again 2040, but not again for the rest of the century. Explaining why would take more time than we’ve got this morning, but I imagine that people in Greek Orthodox Churches are absolutely giddy today!

You see, the Orthodox routinely tell jokes on Easter Sunday in imitation of the sort of cosmic joke that God played on Satan that first Easter. Satan thought he had won on Good Friday when Jesus died, and was feeling pretty smug about imposing sin and death as the final word on all humanity. But, when Jesus rose from the dead, it was like God exclaimed, “April Fools!” and life and salvation became the final word! I don’t have a great joke for you today, but I do have a little Easter limerick:

Here’s the question that Eastertide begs:

Is it all about candy and eggs?

No, the point to be praised

Is that Christ has been raised

And death taken down a few pegs!

Christians believe that Easter Sunday was a day that changed the world. I put a little quote in your bulletin about that from Presbyterian pastor and writer Eugene Peterson. “The gospel message says: ‘You don’t live in a mechanistic world ruled by necessity; you don’t live in a random world ruled by chance; you live in a world ruled by the God of Exodus and Easter. He will do things in you that neither you nor your friends would have supposed possible.’”

Easter confirms that we live in a world in which God is active. Throughout history God has been working through people like Moses, the Apostle Paul, St. Augustine, Martin Luther, William Wilberforce and other opponents of slavery, Martin Luther King, Jr., and those kids from Parkland, Florida who are asking for help to end gun violence against our children. The resurrection of Jesus confirms that God is active in our world. Here’s how it happened according to the Gospel of Matthew.

*After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. <sup>4</sup>For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. <sup>5</sup>But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. <sup>6</sup>He is not*

*here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. (Matt. 28:1-6)*

According to Matthew, the women come to see the tomb. They are seeking comfort after having gone through the appalling and disillusioning events of Good Friday. They are probably hoping for some quiet reflection there. That's not what they get. Instead there are cosmic signs that heaven is breaking into our world. An earthquake, a massive stone rolling away from the tomb, and the blinding sight of a dazzling white angel. The angel tells them not to be afraid, that Jesus isn't there any longer. He has been raised!

I see some similarities between some of us and these women. Some of us have been pretty beat up by life, too! We know what it is to be disillusioned! We've had relationships that didn't work out when we had invested everything into them. Jobs and careers that went nowhere. Financial investments or retirement savings that went south. The deaths of loved ones or estrangements from people we care about. Health issues that we just can't overcome. We've been pretty beat up. And, like the women in the story, we've been looking in the wrong places for comfort, for meaning, for hope. After all, they were looking in a graveyard! So, where do you go for comfort, for answers?

Maybe you've looked in a never-ending series of relationships. Maybe in drugs or alcohol and maybe you've even become dependent on them. Maybe you've thrown yourself into your work until your life is completely out of balance. Maybe in fitness crazes. Maybe you just shop 'til you drop. But maybe, like the women, you are discovering that you're looking in the wrong place. That was the angel's message to the women! "You're looking for Jesus. He is not here in this place of death any more!" Then the angel invited them to come and see for themselves. And they saw that the tomb really was empty!

Maybe you could do what they did. Check out the hope and promises of the resurrection for yourself. Maybe that's why you're here this morning. Good! Keep coming to worship. Join a Sunday School class or other study group. Go on a mission trip. Read the Bible on your own. Talk with a pastor. Like the women, come and see! But there's more to the story! The angel said to the women,

*<sup>7</sup>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."* (Matt. 28:7)

The angel gives the women a task. "Go...and tell." If you are here this morning and you believe that God has raised Jesus from the dead and that the living Christ is able to help us in our daily lives, this is your task,

too. “Go, and tell!” There are people all around you who need the comfort of the gospel, the forgiveness of their sins, and the hope that God is walking with them in their daily lives. There are people all around you who need the assurance that God wants to work with them to make a difference in our world, to right wrongs, to bring about justice. The resurrection is good news, so go, and tell it to others! But check out the next verse. It contains a warning, but it’s one of my favorite verses in the story!

*<sup>8</sup>So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. (Matt. 28:8)*

Notice that these women did exactly what they were told to do. They left to tell the disciples. And they did it quickly, without hesitation. And what was the effect on them? They were both afraid and joyful. I love the honesty of the Bible! This is the experience of the Christian life for most of us. It isn’t all joy and fun and smiley faces. Doing God’s work is often hard! I’m not sure if the women were afraid because of their encounter with the angel, or if they were afraid because they knew the men would think they were looney, coming to them with this crazy story. But they were fearful and joyful. Welcome to the Christian life! Here’s how the passage ends:

*<sup>9</sup>Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. <sup>10</sup>Then Jesus said to them, “Do*

*not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”* (Matt. 28:9-10)

During the season of Lent, we've been talking about "God Moments"-times when people have experienced God's presence. We've looked at such moments in the Bible, and members of the congregation have shared their own God moments in writing and here in worship. In these verses, the women have their very own God Moment, an encounter with the living Christ, the very Jesus they watched die just a few days ago! It must have been an overwhelming experience for them. After some time together, Jesus confirms their mission to go and let the others know the good news, and sends them on their way. And he tells them to arrange a reunion with other followers of Jesus in Galilee. Apparently, gathering the community (like we do here each week) is an important part of experiencing the risen Christ and carrying out his mission.

I close with two thoughts. Some of you may have seen the recently-released film, "A Wrinkle in Time," or read the book by the same name. It was written by Christian author, Madeline L'Engle, who once wrote this: "There are times when I feel that (God) has withdrawn from me, and I have often given him cause, but Easter is always the answer to 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!'" Easter reminds us that God is active in

the world and active in our lives, even in the darkest times. And, God is active in your life today, even if you can't sense it. Please remember that.

My second thought comes from a story that Cheryl Betts put in our Lenten Devotional booklet. It says: The pastor wended his way across the fields to the home of the new family who had just moved into his poor, rural parish. The wife met him at the door. "Does Christ live here?" asked the minister. The startled woman stammered an inaudible reply. After a brief visit the minister moved on. The wife rushed out to the field to find her husband.

"I have just received a visit from the minister," she said. "He asked me the strangest question-'Does Christ live here?'" Her husband looked at her sternly. "I hope you told him, 'We go to church whenever possible-when the weather permits, and it is not planting or harvesting season.' Also, that you told him that we give all we can from the poor living we make off the farm."

"No," answered the still-shaken wife, "I do not think that was what he meant. I am sure it had to do with something deeper than attending church or giving money. It had to do with Christ actually living in our home, and that is very different."

If there were no Easter, the minister's question would make no sense. But because of Easter, because Christ was raised from the dead, because

he is alive and active in our world, the minister's question makes very good sense, and so I ask it to you. Does Christ live in your home? Does he live in your life? In your place of work? In your school? He would like to! And he could do wonderful things there! He only awaits your invitation.