

THE SERMON SUPPLY



A Resource from
Region 6



Resurrection of Our Lord, Year A

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Gospel Text - Matthew 28:1-10

Matthew 28:1-10

¹ After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ² 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. ³ His appearance was like lightning and his clothing white as snow. ⁴ For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. ⁵ But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here, for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷ 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." ⁸ So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers and sisters to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

SERMON TEXT:

It was a quiet morning, by all accounts. The calm after the storm. Death had shown up and death did what death does when it shows up: Jesus ended up in that tomb. Gone. No longer with God's people. The great hope of God's people had ended in utter disappointment. Jesus was just like everyone else, it turned out. The angels didn't come to rescue him. Jesus' prayer on the cross "...my God, my God, why have you forsaken me..." went seemingly unacknowledged and perhaps even unheard. Jesus was mocked. There was no coming down from that cross. Jesus died just like everyone else. And those who put him there were sure glad he did. One more time, it was death that solved the empires problem.

This, people of God, is the death experience that we humans know all too well. Life doesn't go as expected. Accidents happen. Politicians remind us wars must be fought if there is to be peace so that citizens serving their country are always put in harms way. In Jesus' case, it was the authorities themselves who put Jesus to death, and that kind of thing still happens.

Even without empires and politicians, death still has a way of showing up on our doorsteps. A friend. A family member. A diagnosis. Yes, life ends in one way and one way only for humanity: it ends in death. And it rightfully scares us. And it rightfully breaks our hearts.

The women, then, went to the tomb on the first day of the week when dawn had begun to show itself. We don't know why they went to the tomb. Why do WE go to tombs? We go to visit our beloved dead. We go to remember. We go to grieve. We go to honor our loved ones. We go, sometimes, just to convince ourselves that it's really true. Our beloved is no longer with us. We go, that is, to face the reality of death so that we can walk away from the tomb acknowledging that life is now different. That the life we lead now is not the same as it was before death reared its ugly head.

I have to think that's why the women went. They went to acknowledge what happened. They went because they still loved that man who was now dead. They went to try and make sense of

it all. The women went because that's what we do when death has interrupted our lives: we go to the tomb.

But then, an earthquake. And then that stone that took the empire so much work to roll in front of the tomb. But an angel came and rolled it away like it was nothing. Because, for God, the powers of this world that lead to death do not make much of an obstacle. In fact, those big tough guards that the strong old empire sent to the tomb, they fell over like dead men themselves when God intervened by way of the angel. That is, God was making a mockery out of those who thought they could kill Jesus and be rid of the problem. It is more than ironic that the one who was dead wasn't in the tomb dead but was alive while the ones who killed him now lay at the tomb scared to death. No, the powers of this world that lead to death are not so much of an obstacle for this God bent on gifting life to God's people.

And then the message. It's the message that has gathered people from the ends of the earth on days like today. It's the message that has changed lives and destinies. It's the message that has led people to acts of unimaginable courage and bravery.

It's the message that has gone with people to the graves of the little deaths that we die each day and to the actual graves that mark the end of a life. It's a message that has gathered billions of people throughout time. They are the words of the angel...the messenger, "Do not be afraid...I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified...He is not here....for he has been raised..."

It's this message that brings hope on our worst days. The angel's message is the one that brings bravery and courage in the face of challenge and controversy. "Do not be afraid...He is not here...for he has been raised..."

So, my question for you this morning is this: what brings you here? Perhaps it's the possibility that the resurrection might change something for you. Maybe it's out of desperation...death has a way of opening us up to a new dimension of life that, for some reason, is hard to access when we are alive and well. / Sometimes this Easter story brings out folks who are marginally connected to the Jesus community. It's hard to stay away on a day like today because, what if it's true? What if the dead don't

stay dead? What if God is lord even of the dead? / And for some of us, this is a story we have found we cannot live without. It's a story that centers us. It's a story that tells us what God has done and what God can still do.

The women came that first Easter morning and received the angel's message. And then the angel gave them a directive. "Go quickly and tell his disciples, "he has been raised from the dead." Tell them to go to Galilee, there they will see him." What did the women do after receiving this unbelievable news and then this directive from the angel? What would you do? They went. They did the thing the angel asked them to do. And when they went, what happened even before they could fulfill their task?

Jesus met them. The resurrected Jesus. The one who did not stay dead in the tomb. The one who loved them in life and who now loved them in death. "Greetings!" Jesus said. Which seems more than a little underwhelming for the moment. "Greetings?" "Do not be afraid," Jesus told them.

I don't know what this Easter message of Jesus does for you when you hear it. But if the women's story is our story, and I think that it is, then it would seem God's intention for this story is two fold. "Go" the angel told the women. "Go" you will hear at the end of this worship service. "Go and tell" the angel told the women.

Who will you go and tell? And how will you say it in a way that can be heard? Because people you know who are experiencing challenge and struggle might receive an invitation to be added to your prayer list. Because there are strangers who need to be welcomed. And there are enemies that need to be loved. And there are the poor in spirit that could sure use a word of concern and hope. There is a whole world out there facing down one kind of death or another and Jesus is sending you. To them.

Two things the women were told to do. Two things God' intends for you in this story. "Go" Jesus and the angel said to the women...and to us. And, "Do not be afraid" Jesus and the angel both said to the women...and to us. Life's trials and tribulations are different when God rolls away the stone. We no longer need to fear the little deaths we die each day that are part of being

human. God in Christ Jesus has destroyed death. You are raised with Jesus. The powerful who threaten you...they are not so big and bad when the monstrosity of Jesus' resurrection comes over them. Nothing in all of creation can stand between you and God's love for you in Jesus. Whom then should we fear?

Jesus meets you here in this place one more time. He is no longer in the grave. Jesus is alive! "Go." And, "Do not be afraid." A blessed Easter to you, dear church.

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