

## **4-12-2020 SERMON CCI Matthew 28: 1-10 Easter 2020**

Christ is risen. He is risen indeed! Easter is such a joyful day of celebration for Christians. The churches filled with people, beautiful Easter flowers everywhere, joyful Easter hymns, choirs singing. Enjoying Easter dinner around a full family table, kids hunting for Easter eggs.

But it's so different this Easter morning. Thousands of people are on ventilators this morning, while their families pray they will survive. Even more people are grieving the deaths from previous days; exhausted hospital staff came to work again this morning. Bodies are stored in refrigeration trucks and some are being buried in mass graves. And here we are, maybe you're in pajamas instead of Easter clothes, watching your computer screens, singing by yourselves. It is so... quiet! How do we celebrate Christ's resurrection on a day like this, with no fanfare, and the threat of death all around us?

And yet, which was that first Easter morning more like- our usual Easter fanfare, or what we are experiencing today? Jesus' disciples had lived through the terrifying events of Holy Week, falling asleep while Jesus prayed in the garden, running away in fear as Jesus was arrested, seeing him crucified on a cross, and buried in a tomb. They knew what it is like to feel the threat of their own death. They had lived through the long Saturday, sheltering at home afraid to go out. And then came that quiet Sunday morning. There was no Easter sunrise service at the tomb. No one saying excited what we said today, "Christ is risen. He is risen indeed!" No joyful alleluias together in the garden. The garden and the tomb were as quiet that morning as church buildings are today.

Matthew's gospel tells us two Mary's came to the tomb just as the sun began to rise. They knew where to find Jesus's body; they had been there when he was buried and had seen the huge stone placed to seal the tomb. But that's not what they found. Instead, there was a great earthquake that rolled the stone from the tomb and they watched an angel calmly sit on the stone, saying, "Don't be afraid, I know you are looking for Jesus. He's not here for he has been raised just like he said. Come and see where he used to be, if you need to, but quickly, go tell his disciples that Jesus will meet them in Galilee." And off those women ran with joy.

We often act like the empty tomb is all the evidence anyone should need to believe in the resurrection of Jesus. The tomb was empty so of course, Jesus was resurrected. And we try to prove it to people. But if you watch the Discovery or History Channel, you can hear other theories about how Jesus might have seemed to "come back from the dead." Some say Jesus was drugged, faked his death, and later escaped from the tomb. Some say Jesus' resurrection didn't happen physically; it is an inspiring metaphor for the way new life can come out of dark and dead times in our lives. Like an Aesop's fable with a real truth, but there never was a real rabbit and turtle in a race. Or a metaphor of how our death and burial nourish and give new life to the earth. Maybe the disciples imagined the resurrection in their deep grief. It shouldn't surprise us that people find the resurrection a ridiculous claim. It is crazy to believe that a dead man lives again. Rev. Barbara Brown Taylor says it this way,

"...So many of us focus our energy on that tomb, on that morning, on what did or did not happen there and how to explain it to anyone who does not happen to believe it too. Resurrection does not square with anything else we know about physical human life on earth. No one has ever seen it happen... no one saw it happen on Easter morning either."

We all know that CPR done well at the right time is often able to restore life to someone whose heart has stopped. I've resuscitated people as a nurse. Bethel Church in Redding, California 3 months ago asked people around the world to pray that God would resurrect a 2-year-old girl named Olive who had died suddenly. Prayed for a week, and when it didn't happen, she was buried. Resurrection is something we long for after someone dies. But an actual resurrection like Jesus'....

On the other hand, there is plenty of historical evidence that a man from Nazareth named Jesus bar Joseph was crucified and buried at some point in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Enough people witnessed that crucifixion to believe it happened. But no one was present when Jesus rose from the dead. No one saw it happen. So none of us should be upset when people think it's crazy to believe in such a thing. Someone who believes God raised Jesus from the dead is making a claim of faith, not proof.

What if Matthew is inviting us to ask us a different question this Easter that that is just as important as whether we believe. That is: How does our belief change our lives? The guards at the tomb saw much of what the women saw, but it didn't create faith in them. They believed what they saw, and they reported it. But they were content to be paid off to change their story. Their belief had no real effect on their lives.

But those two women... their belief sent them running to share what they had heard. And on the way, the risen Jesus came to them. And now we begin to see the effect of the resurrection on their lives. In verse 10 Jesus says, "Do not be afraid; go tell my brothers and sisters to go to Galilee; there they will see me." The angel said, "Go tell his **disciples**," Jesus said, "Go tell **my brothers and sisters**." The resurrection of Jesus changed the disciples' relationship with God and Christ. They were full members of Jesus' family with a future and a purpose with the risen Jesus.

Those first disciples changed from being terrified people hiding behind locked doors into powerful witnesses of the risen Christ. It wasn't a metaphor, or a fable, or grief that changed them; it was the risen Christ. Changed them into people whose love would amaze their neighbors as they sold their belongings to give to the poor, took care of elderly widows' needs, and even loved their enemies. They had the courage to speak and even die for their faith in this Christ. Their changed lives were the evidence the empty tomb could only hint at. And so it is with us. Do we believe in the resurrection of Christ? Good start. What evidence of the risen Jesus can people see as they interact with us? Do we think and talk like Jesus? Do we love and forgive like Jesus? Do we trust Christ in hopeless situations? Do we stand against injustice like Jesus? Do we care for the people Jesus cares for?

This Easter, do you believe in the risen Christ? If not, I pray the risen Christ will show himself to you and you will know the joy of belief. And if we already believe, may the way we live be the evidence of the risen Christ our world longs to see. The church has left the building, just as Christ left the tomb. Now let us be about what Jesus is about- inviting people to new life and caring for others in His name.