

Easter Sunday – Matthew 28:1-10

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

It's Easter morning. Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" are facing the reality that Jesus their friend and Rabbi is dead. They're sad. There are no celebrations that first Easter morning. No lilies and trumpets or baskets and Easter dresses. There is only grief and sadness in their walk to the tomb.

The earth begins to shake as the women continue on their way; an angel of the Lord from heaven appears. He rolls back the stone and then (this is my favorite part) sat on it. I envision him to be like a proud child saying to everyone, "Look what I did!"

The angel "appeared like lightening" and his clothing was white as snow. He scared the pants off the Roman guards and they collapsed. But the angel said to the women, "Don't be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He's not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come see the place where he lay."

After being instructed to do so, they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy to tell the disciples.

Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" They bowed down to his feet and worshipped him. Then he said, "Don't be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary", left with fear and great joy. Matthew's portrayal of the women's first encounter with Jesus is very different than the gospel of Mark's account. In Mark the women find the tomb already open when they get there. Someone else is in the tomb and when they're instructed to tell the disciples that Jesus is risen "the women leave with terror and amazement.

In Matthew we hear the women "left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy. (28:8)" Fear and joy aren't opposites. Just like faith and doubt can be experienced at the same time, might we consider fear and joy to be inseparable too?

Let's face it, fear is everywhere for all kinds of reasons. Jesus' resurrection does not spell the end of fear for those who follow him but makes it possible to experience joy amid what might otherwise be crippling fear. Resurrection that is, doesn't simply answer or end problems, but rather it creates something new. Christian faith doesn't remove us from the hardships, limitations, and challenges of this life but creates for us possibilities that simply wouldn't be available had God not intervened, first in the raising of Jesus and again by entering into our own lives.

Jesus' entrance into our lives is not just so we can live without fear but with joy. His coming is not simply so we can have hope and peace. It is not that we will experience comfort that comes. Jesus comes to invite us to a life of courage.

After Jesus instructs Mary Magdalene and the other Mary "do not be afraid," there is an invitation or a command, "come and see... go and tell."

"Come and see... go and tell." These aren't words only for the women or for the disciples. They speak to us.

The resurrection is not a once-and-done event. The resurrection reflects the dynamic and ongoing nature and work of the God we meet in Christ.

Easter equals victory in the Christian tradition. This day, this celebration, and this story form the pinnacle of our church year and constitute the bedrock of our faith. We shout it in the sanctuary: "Alleluia, Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!" As we gather for the meal we proclaim the mystery of the faith: "Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again." Yes, upon the resurrection hook we hang our hopeful hat.

But hats aren't meant to be hung forever, and sandals are meant to be worn, not stashed away in a closet. As people of resurrection faith, we are sent. Jesus' words to his first evangelists—the women—and his first disciples are equally applicable to us today. We are not to hide our light under a basket. We are not to lock our faith away in fear. We are to go. We are to tell. We are to be Christ's witnesses sent out of our sanctuaries and comfort zones into the hustle of the marketplace and bustle of

the world. How else can Jesus be seen in our time-bound, gravity-laden workaday world?

Today is not just for hearty alleluias and the heady scent of spring flowers. Nor is it a day for only finery and fanfare. This is the dawn of a new reality that transcends time, reason, and rationale. Our story is ground-breaking and earthshaking. It is raw and fresh and ever-new. We believe that the God we cannot see nor fully comprehend loved us enough to enter our small world of flesh and bone, to walk the dirt roads and recesses of our narrow minds and barren lands, to die the worst possible public death, and then to shrug it all off and walk headlong into eternity dragging the whole ragtag bunch of us along for the ride.

Easter is a celebration about time—sort of. It's a festival reminder that God's time is not our time. The resurrection story exemplifies how God's radical and abundant mercy, grace, and love shatter the limits of time and fill these cracked vessels we call humankind with eternal hope and possibility. In the mystery of faith past, present, and future, we experience and live into the endless circle of salvation.

So this Easter day, place yourselves in the upper room with the fearful disciples. Ask yourselves what fears bind you and our community today. Then, hear the women and their bold witness to Jesus' words: "Do not be afraid, go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

If we don't go and tell our sisters and brothers, how will they see Jesus? How will they experience the Holy One who transcends the limits of our time, sight, and reality if we do not tell the story? We are the witnesses to Christ's presence in Word, water, wine, and bread. We live in him within his body, the church, and as the second lesson reminds us, "When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory" (Col 3:4). Isn't it about time we go and tell so that all may see and know? What better time than Easter to be sent anew as stewards of the Good News?