

*The Joyful Certainty of the Resurrection*  
**Sermon for the Festival of the Resurrection of Our Lord**  
**April 12, 2020**

Text: Matthew 28:1-10

Now after the Sabbath, towards the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, as He said. Come, see the place where He lay. Then go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead, and behold, He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see Him. See, I have told you." So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell His disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshipped Him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell My brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me."

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia! Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our risen and living Lord Jesus. Amen.

Into a world and into our personal lives filled with uncertainty, high anxiety and fear because of the corona virus and covid-19, infection and death, job insecurities, financial upheaval, unmanageably low grain prices, and wild speculations about how life will never be the same, to such a world and such a life what a joy we have to bring to you the good news that transforms lives—all of life—even the whole world—Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. This certainty, this truth, of a crucified and risen Savior changes everything! We are filled with joyful hope no matter what tomorrow brings for the living Christ Jesus our Savior goes before us and will always meet us there!

The personal world of Jesus' followers certainly appeared to have come to an end the Friday before as Jesus had been brutally crucified. He had died and He had been buried. Now it's Sunday morning, toward dawn of the first day of the week and Mary Magdalene and the other Mary are on their way to Jesus' grave. St. Mark and St. Luke tell us there were other women with them. Matthew mentions two because these same two He has already mentioned at the end of the previous chapter as eyewitnesses of Jesus' burial. Who sees what is always very important for us. God wants us to be sure.

It's also important for us to understand what we are told about what Mary Magdalene and Mary went to see. They went to see Jesus' tomb. They expect to see only the past. It's very important for us to understand this because humans, we sinful humans who live in a world of sinful brokenness and death, live in fear and dread because left to ourselves we cannot see what God can do and what God is doing. God has to show us and He has and He will!

First, to get everyone's attention, there is a great earthquake, a really big earthquake. Now on the Friday before there had been an earthquake when Jesus had died. Yes, the earth had quaked when God's Son died on the cross for sinners. He died to pay the price we deserved to personally pay for our sins. But now, the earth quakes again, and it's a bigger quake. God is doing a new thing, and He sends a holy angel down from heaven to show what has happened. The guards at the tomb trembled and fell down like dead men. The angel rolled back that heavy stone that had been rolled in front of the grave's entrance and had been sealed. Jesus was already risen and alive and out of the grave, the angel just sat and waited for the women to show them.

The angels said to the women, "Stop being afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus, the crucified one. He is not here, for He has risen, as He said. Come and see the place where He lay.

Then go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead, and behold, He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see Him. See, I have told you.”

The women saw the empty tomb. No doubt their walk to the tomb that morning had been slow. Now with great joy they run to tell the disciples. Obeying the angel, the women see even more. On the way they see Jesus! They see Jesus, their Lord, whom they had seen crucified, dead, and buried now alive! Jesus greets them and they fall down, take hold of His feet and worship Him. They took hold of His feet! Jesus has real feet! This is no vision, this is no dream, no hallucination! This is really Jesus!

Jesus Himself tells them “Stop being afraid.” Jesus sends them on their way His disciples and He says, “Tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me.” Everything is being confirmed for the women. They saw an angel; they saw Jesus. They heard a message from the angel; they heard the same message from Jesus. God is always giving us a sure message.

We need this sure message because we live with so much uncertainty. We see problems; Jesus promises to be with us. We see life changing; Jesus promises He does not change in His love and care for us. We see death and we mourn; our living Savior says He will change these mortal dying bodies to be like His glorious body.

I can't presume to specifically list God's purposes in this pandemic crisis. One thing, however, we should always see clearly is that any trouble should remind us that we are not in control of our lives. Of one thing I am certain this crisis reminds us is that God is teaching us again how desperately we need Him and He is calling each of us to return to Him in faith. And I am certain on account of Jesus' resurrection from the dead that He will receive us with forgiveness and blessing all who heed His call, no matter how far we may have strayed, no matter how fearful or doubting we have been. I know this because of Jesus' words in our text.

Jesus told the women, Go and tell My brothers to go to Galilee.” “Tell My brothers.” The disciples had all deserted Jesus, but now He calls them “My brothers”. The disciples had all turned away from Jesus in their fear and abandoned Him. They had failed Him miserably. So have we. But no matter—Jesus went on alone to complete the saving work by suffering and dying for sinners, also for His disciples who abandoned Him, also for you and me.

Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and He calls you and me and addresses us as His brothers and sisters. He has called us to faith. He has baptized us and washed away our sins so that we are welcomed as the children of God. He has given to us the same promise He gave to His brothers when He met later them in Galilee, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

We need Jesus more and more than ever, but we need Him on His terms and not on ours. We need Jesus as we see in this time of crisis with uncertainty, and suffering, and death all around us. The Good News of the Resurrection is that Jesus is for us and He is with us and forever.

Mindy Belz is a Christian news journalist. Last month, before everything was shut down, she was returning from the African country of Kenya where she had been researching for a story. Mindy wrote this: “I was on a sold-out flight three days before Kenya halted all international flights. It was crushing to see the empty Nairobi airport: taxis outside waiting and no passengers coming in, airline staff friendly but resigned to possible layoffs any day. It felt like watching people's livelihoods destroyed. The Kenyan who drove me to the airport said, “Starting next week, life is going to be very hard. But God cannot forget His people.” (World reporter Emily Belz, World Vol 35, #7, 04.11.2020)

That Kenyan taxi driver is so correct: God cannot forget His people. No matter how difficult the time, no matter what the suffering, no matter what the diagnosis, no matter if life is turned upside down and all you counted as safe and sure is threatened or even taken away, no matter if death comes, God cannot forsake His people. He did not abandon His Son to the grave but He raised Him from the dead. He will never leave you.

Think of how that ground trembled under Jesus' tomb. See the mighty hand breaking the

futile seal on Jesus' tomb put there by the governing authorities. See that huge stone flipped aside. The greatest disruption the world ever saw has already happened. That divine disruption conquered sin and death and every fear and trouble and heartache for you and me. We are already living it by faith. I can't predict what the coming weeks will bring, but Jesus Christ has already predicted you and me. The near future may be obscure; but the ultimate one secure. Live in the joyful confidence the risen Jesus has secured for you. We cannot always see what God is doing, but God has shown us and He will. You can be sure for: Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

In the name of Jesus. Amen.