

FGBC: Easter Sunday: Alive!

Matthew 28:1-10

April 12, 2020

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If you've got a Bible, go get it. That means take 20 seconds, stand up. It's on your bedside table and you are in the living room. Or it's in your pocket. It's not a hardship. You can do it! Grab it, follow along. Today we are in Matthew 28 because it's Easter.

Easter is the Christmas of the Christian calendar, or at least it should be. It's the big celebration. This three day weekend, from Good Friday, the day Jesus laid His life down, to Easter Sunday when He rose, is the high point of Jesus' time on earth. Everything He did; everything He taught; every step He took was a step towards this weekend where He would take our sin and brokenness upon Himself and take it to the grave. And then by rising again Easter morning He would defeat death and prove the legitimacy of everything He taught.

When somebody comes back from the dead their story is worth listening to. And nobody has done this like Jesus. Lots of people have had near death experiences. People have been resuscitated by CPR. But nobody has spent 3 days dead in the ground and then thrown the covers off, ripped the tomb open and walked out. Nobody's done that but Jesus.

And when somebody comes back from the dead their words are worth listening to. Particularly if they said: "I'm going to die and come back" – and He did. And especially if they said: "My death and resurrection isn't just for Me, it's your path to life now and for eternity" – and He did.

So would you stand with me where you are and let's read the resurrection story from Matthew 28 starting in verse 1. Hear now the word of the Lord:

[Read Matthew 28:1-10;16-18]

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. That's a lot of authority. He's got authority over all the political wrangling and all the military might.

He's got authority over the bouncing stock market and the trillions in aid packages that are being given out globally. Who knows what the economy is going to do over the next weeks and months and years. But Jesus has authority over all this.

And He's got the authority over the medical system. So whether there is care available when you need it or not, He's got this. That's a bit of a hard pill to swallow isn't it? We prefer if His taking care of us means we never get sick or lose our job. But that's not how it works. Trusting God's sovereignty means we live like He's got this no matter what happens.

“What! If bad stuff happens to me or my family my faith is going to shake. I’m going to let Jesus have it.”

Friends, faith isn’t something you just have when you need it, it’s a muscle you work out and strengthen so it’s there when you need it.

So are you doing things to build your faith? Over the last 3 weeks of quarantine have you been doing things that build your faith? Or have you let yourself slump? Have you watched every show on Netflix while you hold out for things to get back to normal? You’re going to need some faith in the days to come. So invest in it.

And I’m not saying “just have a little faith. Faith in anything.” Following Jesus isn’t about warm fuzzies and good thoughts. No our faith is built on the words of Jesus and the historical fact that He came back from the dead.

So Jesus said things like:

I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through Me. (John 14:6)

Jesus believed He was the exclusive path to God. And He believed His path was good news for us. He said:

The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life. (John 10:10)

And when someone says things like this and then comes back from the dead it has implications... But did He really come back from the dead, or was it more of a figurative thing? He just lives on in our memories? How do we know?

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We know because it was a public event. So in Mormonism Joseph Smith gets some golden plates from an angel and writes the book of Mormon. But then the angel asked for the plates back. And yes there were 3 other witnesses who had a vision about the plates, but then they all left Joseph’s church. Two only returned after he was dead in order to take on positions of prominence. So you make your own decisions about how credible that is.

But that’s not how it worked with Jesus. So in verse 1 Mary and Mary head off to the tomb early Sunday morning – that’s Jesus’ mom and Mary Magdalene.¹ And they meet an angel there who is a total boss. There’s an earthquake and he just rolls back the stone and sits on it. He’s wearing black shades. He’s got a YouTube channel. There are guards littered all over the ground. He’s a boss.

And these couple Marys aren’t expecting this. But the angel tells them “Don’t be afraid. You guys are looking for Jesus who was crucified a couple days ago. He’s not here. He has risen.”

¹ Compare this verse with Mark 16:1

Now here's what you need to see: the stone gets rolled away, not to let Jesus out, but to let witnesses in. This is important. You see the resurrection of Jesus sits at the very center of what it means to be a Jesus follower.

So if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then all this is for not. It's all broken. 100% of Christianity is a sham if Jesus didn't rise from the dead.

Now here's a weird thing. There are aspects of the church in Canada, that say: "Well it's the scientific age. Miracles were for the olden days when people were superstitious. We know better now. We are enlightened. And so probably what happened is Jesus came back to life in the hearts of His people.

The disciples were so troubled that they got together and said "Hey remember Jesus? Remember some of the awesome stuff He talked about? Let's not forget."

And as they all not forgot together He just kind of came back to life in their hearts. That's what some so called "Christians" are teaching. But what a train wreck!

There is no point to being a Jesus follower if there is no resurrection. And this is really important because following Jesus isn't like being a four-year-old believes in the tooth fairy (I hope no kids are still listening still because I'm about to ruin childhood).

Believing in the tooth fairy has no impact on anyone's life. You loose the teeth whether you believe or not. And then if you do believe you get a quarter under your pillow and if you don't believe a quarter still shows up. And then you wake up and go about life not thinking about it until you lose your next tooth.

But following Jesus isn't like that. Following Jesus is an all in, give your life, put everything else on hold, kind of deal. Jesus says "unless you love Me more than you love your family you've got no part of Me." So a month ago Andrew and Jaelynn were at Lighthouse and told us how they are on their way to Angola West Africa with Missions aviation. Not for some tourism – there is no tourism there. They are moving there for the rest of their lives – that's the plan.

Why would anyone do that if Jesus just rose from the dead in our hearts? Nobody would do that. And that's why churches that have been preaching this message are declining. Nobody even wants to get out of bed on Sunday if Jesus just came back from the dead in our hearts.

But He didn't. And that's why the stone is rolled away. It's not because Jesus needed to get out. He was already gone. The angel rolls the stone away so that we can come in and see what happened.

And so the women – verse 9 – and the disciples – verse 17 – see that Jesus is gone, and then they see Jesus. And He lets them touch Him and worship Him because He's God.

To worship someone means to center your life around them. And they did. And the historical record verifies that none of them left His church. They went to their graves – lots of them bloody graves – refusing to deny Jesus was back.

Friends, the resurrection of Jesus – the bodily, real, resurrection of Jesus – is a historical fact that was verified by witnesses. They saw Him die. And then they saw Him alive. And not barely alive. Not on the respirator, clinging to the edges of life “alive.” But totally alive. Abundantly alive. And seeing this changed their lives, and it can change yours.

You see Jesus’ resurrection means everything we thought about life is different that it actually is – reality is different than we thought it was.

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Next week we are returning to our study through Revelation. It’s a book about what happens at the end. And it’s a book that lets us see the reality behind what is happening now. So be back, same time and same place – your couch – for that. Because Jesus’ resurrection changes reality.

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So I’m not a huge zombie fan. But there is a whole section of the movie industry dedicated to zombies. And the basic premise in all these shows is that something unnatural happens.

I think the last zombie movie I saw was World War Z with Brad Pitt in 2013. I know some of you were in kindergarten back then – I’m sorry about being so irrelevant. But in this movie there is this virus that causes a pandemic – not so irrelevant hey?

But this pandemic does something unnatural. It turns people into zombies. And a zombie is basically a person that is essentially dead – they aren’t that person anymore. But instead of being dead they are alive.

And that’s not natural. It’s not natural for a dead thing to be alive. That’s the premise of all these zombie movies. Death is natural but resurrection is unnatural.

But with Jesus’ story this all gets flipped on its head. It’s death that is unnatural and resurrection is natural.

You see death wasn’t God’s design. Death wasn’t in the picture until sin entered. And with Jesus we get the beginning of coming back to God’s design.

Jesus conquers death and sin, and this has huge implications for us. You see the abundant life that He has isn’t just for Him, He’s offering it to us. And this is the new normal now. Life after death can happen to you. But it’s not a zombie kind of life – that would really just be death after death. It’s a new life.

Here’s how the Bible talks about this. In Ephesians 2 Paul writes:

Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world... All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. (Ephesians 2:1-3)

Notice what the Bible says. It says before anyone comes to Christ they are the walking dead. Before Jesus, when you aren't fighting sin, fighting your addictions, fighting to live in response to what Jesus has done for you, you aren't living in freedom doing what you want. You are a slave. You are dead. And then it's from that position of dead that something happens to some people. Paul continues:

But God is so rich in mercy, and He loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, He gave us life when He raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) For He raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4-6)

People who give themselves to Jesus have been raised to new life. Past tense. He gave us life. He raised us from the dead. He seated us with Him in the heavenly realms. We are united with Christ. This is what we have access to because Jesus came back from the dead.

So here's the word: it doesn't matter what your history is full of; the pain you've experienced. It doesn't matter what's had power over you. The historical fact that Jesus has come back from the dead means that your present and your future can be different. You can have the abundant life you were designed for. The forgiveness of Jesus is available.

So no matter where you find yourself today. If last night you were a sin wreck. If you barely limped out of your bedroom to take this in – let's be honest, some of us haven't brushed our teeth today. That's okay, there's no judgment.

But regardless of how you find yourself right now your situation isn't too big for Jesus. Your sin isn't too big for Jesus. He beat the grave! And so He's big enough to walk with you through your struggles, through quarantine – your faith doesn't have to go out the window. He's big enough to bring you out of your sin addiction and into the abundant life He has for you. Don't pass this by. The resurrection has real implications for you. What He offers us starts now and lasts for eternity. Don't miss out on another day of abundant life!

Here's the last thing I want to bring out of this passage. Verse 8 – So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell His disciples.”

Fear, and yet joy. Does that seem a little weird? Have you ever been very frightened, as another translation says, and yet full of joy?

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I think sometimes when we read the Bible we skim over verses like this thinking: “The Bible's always spurting off Bible talk, and it just sounds spiritual but it doesn't actually mean anything (You probably don't think that, but if you've ever glossed over a phrase like this that's what you are saying – this probably isn't important). Have you done that? My hand's up. If your hand's not up you either haven't read the Bible or you're lying.

Here's the problem. The Bible never throws away words just to sound spiritual. There's meaning here. In fact this is the point of the passage.

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So I can think of two instances when I was both full of fear and joy in the same second.

The first one happened 19 years ago when I looked across the church and saw a beautiful woman holding the arm of a huge dude – Nikki's dad is big. And I was excited. I was full of joy. But then, when she was about halfway down the aisle my 21-year-old self who didn't even know how to shop for my own clothes realized “It's my responsibility to take care of this woman now. I'd better get a job.”

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I remember the same kind of thought when Elliana was born. I remember thinking “Who decided I was mature enough to be able to handle a little people moving into my house? Like did I pass a dad test somewhere? How did this happen?” I've had so many kids since then and the feeling's never been the same. I'm immune now.

The point is: fear and joy in the same moment. In fact fear and joy are the appropriate responses in incredibly important moments. They lead to the appropriate action. The action was grow up fast. It's not okay for boys to be husbands. Ladies, if you've been looking for love from video-game-playing, mom's-basement-living boys that's your problem. Find a man who loves Jesus. And boys grow up! Women need men, and men need faith-filled women. And babies need adults who are okay with touching poo.

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I could insert all sorts of stories here, but I'll leave this to your imagination. Just imagine lots of poo everywhere. My kids all have the spiritual gift of poo. And there is no way I would have been able to handle any of that without the fear and joy of those moments.

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Now here's how this relates to God. Throughout scripture fear is one of the most common words used to talk about our relationship with God. And it's used in two ways. About half the times it is Jesus and angels saying what gets said in this passage – “Don't be afraid.”

And this isn't a throw away because all the guys who didn't believe in resurrection and were guarding the dead guy are now lying around like they're dead because He's alive. Get your head around that.

And so Jesus, verse 10, and the angel, verse 5, say: "don't be afraid."

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The other half the time the Bible talks about fear it's saying stuff like Solomon says in Proverbs:

Fear of the LORD is the foundation of wisdom.

Knowledge of the Holy One results in good judgment. (Proverbs 9:10)

This means it's healthy to fear God. In fact if you don't fear God you don't have any real knowledge of Him.

This quarantine has brought a new level of "personal" to celebrity culture. Jimmy Fallon is hosting Late Night from home with his kids – they don't have the spiritual gift of poo. And Lady Gaga is putting on an at home concert. And this can give us the sense that we know these people, but we don't. We know about them. And people who know about God often have no fear of Him. But knowing God results in good judgment.

And that's what these women do in this passage. They fear. But it's not terror. There is joy with it. And it results in good judgment. The right response when you know someone who has come back from the dead is worship – center your life around Him.

And that's what happens here. These women are full of fear and joy and they go and tell.

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The problem with the church today is that we don't talk nearly enough about the fear of God. We talk about love and mercy, and all that is good. But that's not the whole story. Yes there is love. Yes there is forgiveness. Yes there is abundant life. But it's not for free. It cost God His life. That's how grave a matter this is. But then this grave matter became the biggest and heaviest joy matter.

It's not silly joy. It's not flippant joy. It's you just had a baby joy. It's you just got married joy. It's heavy joy. And everything changes now.

The new normal now isn't that living things die, it is that dead things can really live. And if you see that and taste it then it will change you.

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Have you ever wondered why God shows up in the Bible but He doesn't show up in your life in the same way? Have you ever thought "If I was there at the tomb and got to see Jesus then I wouldn't have the problems with doubt that I have today. Why doesn't God show up in my life?" But then you spend 5 minutes a day reading the Bible and 5 hours a day on social media and Netflix. And you wonder why God isn't showing up.

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Do you know why Jesus showed up to these women? He showed up to them because they were there in the morning trying to be close to Him. They knew Him and wanted to know Him more.

It's Easter 2020, and if you want Jesus to show up in your life He will. But you need to get off the couch, get to the tomb, repent from holding yourself back from Him, and expect to meet someone alive there.

So don't waste your life. Don't waste this quarantine waiting for things to get back to normal. Start seeking God today and get ready for the abundant life He wants to give you that starts now and lasts forever because He's alive!