

In our reading from Matthew's Gospel this evening, we encounter the Matthean story of the resurrection. The 4 Gospels have their own accounts with comparatively minor differences. Matthew's account is the most dramatic with an earthquake and an angel rolling the stone away from the tomb clearly signifying that God transcends the power of nature. The stories have different witnesses to the fact of the resurrection or at least of the empty tomb. There are two things that each of the 4 stories have in common. None of them are resurrection accounts. They do not describe the event of the resurrection. They are post-resurrection accounts describing one way or another, the empty tomb. In Matthew's account, the earthquake causes the stone to move and unseal the tomb, but unlike Lazarus in John's account Jesus raising him, Jesus does not emerge through the opened portal still clad in his death cloths. He is simply not there. No one in any one of the Gospels sees Jesus emerge from the tomb. *He is not there* is the clarion call of Easter.

The second thing that the 4 Gospels share is that without exception the first witnesses to the empty tomb are women. The cast of female characters varies. Mary Magdalene is the constant across the four. In Matthew the Magdalene is joined by Mary of Clopas sister-in-law to Joseph, Jesus' earthly father. In Mark, in addition to Mary Magdalene and Mary of Clopas is Salome, the wife of Zebedee and the mother of James and John. In Luke, Mary Magdalene and Mary of Clopas are joined by Joanna who had provided financial support to Jesus' ministry. In John, Mary Magdalene is alone when she discovers the empty tomb. The key point is that they are all women. Now it is easy to rationalize the curious and uncharacteristic role played by woman in discovering the empty tomb by saying that the disciples were hiding in an upper room with a barred door for fear of the Roman authorities while the woman would have been perceived as no threat whatsoever to Roman authority. But I think there is something much more important to say. I will come to it a little later.

Another thing that is shared by three of the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and John is that while Jesus may appear to the women and in some cases to the disciples his message is clear, meet me in Galilee. Only Luke says the disciples were to wait in Jerusalem until they have been *clothed by power from on high*. So what is so special about Galilee. To understand, we turn to Matthew 4: *Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the gentiles— Galilee of the Gentiles.*

You may recall that for some months our Gospel passages spoke of Jesus crossing back and forth across the Sea of Galilee working miracles on each side. At the time, I often emphasized in these weekly homilies that one side of the sea was Jewish territory and the other was Gentile territory. Perhaps this was most clear in the stories of the feeding of the multitudes. 5000 thousand on the

Jewish side reflecting the 5 books of the Torah and 4 thousand on the Gentile side reflecting the four directions of the compass. For the resurrected Jesus to command the disciples to meet him in Galilee is a clear unequivocal statement that their ministry is now not just to those under the law, the Mosaic Covenant, but to all the world. Hence the statement in our reading this evening: *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.*

It is important to grasp how radical a development this movement to Galilee was in that post-resurrection world. The Temple was on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem. In it was the Holy of Holies believed to be the earthly home of God and the centre of the world. But Jesus launches the post-resurrection ministry in Galilee of the Gentiles. Everything in about 12 or so thousand years of Jewish history was about separation, staying apart, staying clean, rejecting other, turning away from the stranger. Remember on Good Friday how the Chief Priests would not even enter Pilate's residence because they would have been defiled. Now the risen Christ says make disciples of all the nations. Now let me come back to the women at the empty tomb, I believe that these accounts are also about removing barriers. The discovery of the empty tomb by women is not just about the male movers and shakers having cause for caution. As much as Jesus was breaking down barriers between Jew and Gentile, he was breaking down barriers between the genders. If the church had not been cursed by the misogyny and patriarchy of empires for over 2000 years, imagine what the church might have been today; how many disciples there might have been among the nations.

There remain too many barriers amongst us, but let us not lose sight of all the barriers we have torn down. When I was young, it would have been unimaginable that we would have a woman incumbent, leave alone a woman bishop, leave alone a woman Archbishop of Canterbury. There remain too many barriers, but many fewer than once there were. I preach to you once a week with the permission of the bishop. When I was a young man, I was pronounced to be damned and to be hell-bound because I love a man. Are we fully ready to make disciples of all the nations, not by a long chalk, but we have made progress and we must continue to build upon it anywhere we can in the Galilee of the Gentiles. And we must guard against those who would reconstruct the barriers we have destroyed.

Lastly for this evening. *And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.* Yes Jesus the Christ is with us always, but not just since the resurrection. Think of the prologue of John. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.* The Word, the Logos, the Christ has been from before the entire 13.8 billion years of creation and will be still there beyond time. Amen