

Do Not Be Afraid: Life Beyond the Tomb

Bible reference for sermon Matthew 28:1-10

² And suddenly there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning and his clothing white as snow. ⁴ For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. ⁵ But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here, for he has been raised,

Grace and peace to you in the name of the crucified and risen Christ.

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!

Matthew tells the Easter story with a jolt. An earthquake—a seismos. The ground itself gives way beneath what seemed certain. This is not a quiet sunrise moment or a gentle, sentimental scene. The resurrection arrives with disruption—with movement, with energy, with the unsettling sense that something enormous has happened and nothing will ever quite sit the same again.

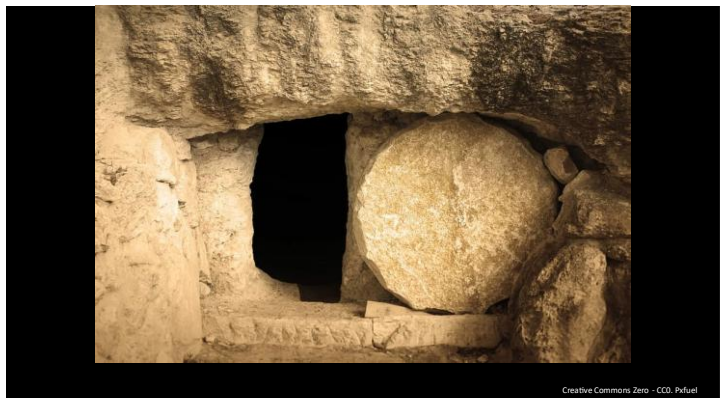
And maybe that's where Easter meets us most honestly.

Because we know what it is to have the ground shift under our feet. We've lived through years where the world has felt unstable—pandemics, climate anxiety, economic strain, and fractures in our common life. And in our own stories, we know the quieter earthquakes too: grief that lingers, relationships that fracture, the slow wearing down of hope when things don't turn out as we expected. The illness and death of those we cherish most dearly.

Easter does not arrive after these things are resolved. It arrives in the shaking. And it speaks—not first as explanation, but as promise.

Matthew's account is bold. An angel descends. The stone is rolled away and sat upon. The guard's collapse. Everything that seemed immovable—empire, violence, death—is revealed to be temporary in the face of God.

We see God's power at work. But this is not coercive power. This is not



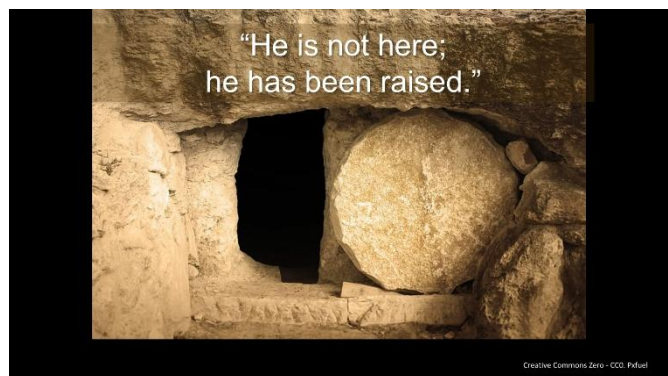
domination. This is not God taking control in the way empires do. This is the power of promise.

The promise that God makes and keeps. The promise spoken already in Jesus' life: that God is with us, that mercy outruns judgment, that the last word will be life. And now, in the resurrection, that promise is fulfilled—not by human effort, but by God's grace alone.

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary come simply "to see the tomb." They are not expecting resurrection. They are not displaying heroic faith. They come with grief. And that is enough. Because Easter is not a reward for strong faith. It is a gift of grace given to those who do not yet understand. They do not raise Jesus. They do not make resurrection happen. They simply receive the announcement:

"He is not here; he has been raised."

This is how God works. God acts first. God speaks first. God gives first. And faith is not something we manufacture—it is what happens when we hear that promise and, somehow, dare to trust it.



Fear runs through this whole story. The earth shakes. The guards tremble. The women are afraid. And still, the first word spoken into that fear is not instruction—it is gospel:

"Do not be afraid." It is a word spoken into our fear that creates what it promises.

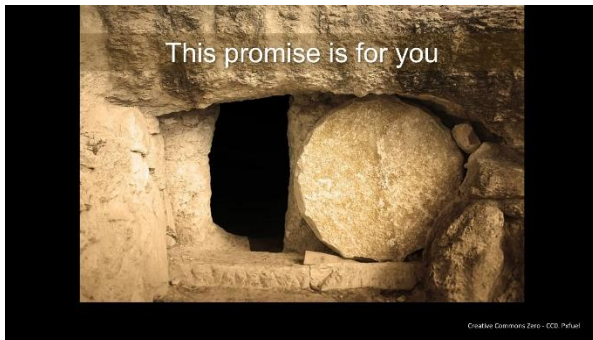
When Jesus says, "Do not be afraid," he is not asking the women to feel differently. He is giving them something to stand on. A promise: that they are not alone, that death is not ultimate, that God is already at work.

And this promise stretches beyond that moment. Because the resurrection is not only about Jesus. It is about what God is doing for all of us. In Christ, God does not simply reverse one death. God opens a future in which death itself no longer has final authority.

This is eternal life.

Not merely life after death in some distant sense, but life that is held in God now, and that cannot be taken away—not by death, not by time, not by anything in all creation. This is not something we earn. It is not something we achieve. It is given. Promised. Declared. And received in faith.

There is another detail in Matthew's story that is easy to miss. The angel rolls away the



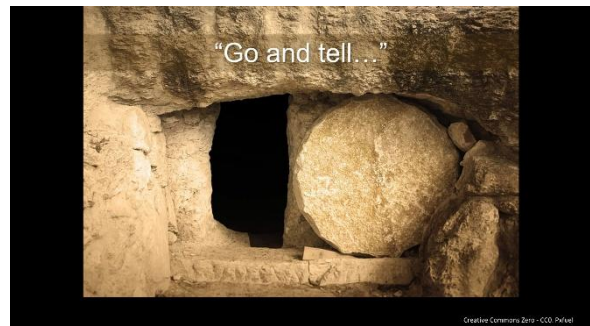
stone—but Jesus is already gone. The stone is not removed for Jesus. It is removed for the women. So they can see. So they can hear the Word. So they can receive the promise. God meets them in an empty tomb. Just as God meets us in tangible signs joined to the Word. Water. Bread. Wine. These are not explanations. They are means of grace. Places where

God says: **“This promise is for you.”**

The empty tomb is not proof to be solved. It is proclamation: death does not hold him. And therefore, death does not hold you.

So, the women leave with fear and great joy. And they run. Not because they have certainty, but because they have heard a promise. This is faith. Not certainty. Not clarity. But trust in the Word that has been spoken. Faith runs—even trembling—because faith is not confidence in ourselves. It is confidence in God's promise. And even as they go, Jesus appears to them and gives them himself. On our journey of faith, Jesus can surprise us in the ways in which he is present with us. He encourages them - **“Go and tell...”**

The resurrection creates a chain of proclamation. The angel speaks to the women. The women to the disciples. The church to the world. This is how the gospel lives—not as an idea, but as a Word spoken from one person to another.



And this Word does something. It creates faith. It gives hope. It delivers what it promises. Even now. Even here. And because this promise is real, it reshapes how we live. If God raises the crucified one, then no life is disposable. If God defeats death, then systems built on fear and death are already under judgment. If God promises eternal life, then every person carries a dignity that cannot be erased.

This is not something we achieve through moral effort. It flows from grace. We live differently not to earn God's love, but because we already have it.

And where do we encounter this risen life now? Not in grand displays of power, but in the ordinary places God has promised to be: in the Word proclaimed, when the good news is spoken and heard; in Baptism, where we are joined to Christ's death and

resurrection; in Holy Communion, where Christ gives himself to us again and again, saying, **“This is my body, given for you.”**

Here, the risen Christ meets us—not as an idea, but as a living presence—giving forgiveness, giving life, giving himself.

So, dear friends, how do we live as resurrection people?

It means we live by promise. We wake each day not certain of the future but trusting the One who holds it. We face fear—not denying it but refusing to let it define us. We love—not because the world is safe, but because love is stronger than death. We hope—not because we are optimistic, but because Christ is risen.

And so, we return to that voice spoken into a shaking world: **“Do not be afraid.”**

Not because nothing will ever go wrong, but because we are not alone. Because we are held in God’s grace. Because our lives are hidden with Christ in God. Because nothing—not even death—can separate us from that love.

So, we do what the church has always done.

We receive the promise.

We trust it.

We carry it.

And we proclaim it:

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!

Amen. Video of the service including the above address can be found on the St Paul’s Lutheran Church Youtube page

<https://www.youtube.com/@stpaulslutheranchurchboxhi1133>