

Sermon – April 9, 2023
“They will see me.”
The Rev. John C. Wright



Text: Matthew 28:1-10

Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come. Visit and fill our open hearts and anoint the sharing of these words, making them a blessing for your people that continues our transformation into Christ's image and leads us to fruitful labor as we follow Jesus into his mission right here, right now. Amen

It's Easter. The Son rose this morning. Women went to the tomb and came back with Good News. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Did you ever think about that statement? Did we ever stop and ask ourselves, "What does it mean that the tomb was empty?" or "What does it mean that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead?" Let's look at Matthew's account of Easter morning together and as we do, let me encourage you to be ready to give your response to "Christ is risen!": "He is risen indeed!"

It is the day after the Sabbath. It is early dawn time on the first day of the week. Into the garden come two women. They have come as soon as it was light enough to see the tomb. Deep within, they may have had a desire that somehow everything that had happened would be set right and they would see Jesus again. But they come knowing that on Friday, Jesus was crucified

and died. They were faithful and courageous watching as Jesus' lifeless body was placed into the tomb and a stone was rolled over the entrance. Their hearts burn for Jesus, and they have come to see the tomb where he was laid. Since they last saw the tomb, there has been a seal placed over the entrance that warns of consequences from Rome if the tomb is disturbed, and there are also Roman soldiers present watching the tomb to ensure that no one will take Jesus' body.

And then everything changes. There is an earthquake and an angel of the Lord whose appearance was like lightning and whose clothes were as white as snow comes, rolls back the stone, and sits on it. First, we should catch that there are two earthquakes that have happened recently in Jerusalem. One occurred when Jesus died and the other at his resurrection. As the angel descends, the earth shakes as if there is joy in the earth at this moment.ⁱ Creation that shook at Jesus' death now moves again as if in joy at the arrival of the angel. For the angel, the seasoned fighters who guard the tomb are not an issue. The angel's arrival causes these warriors to fall to the ground in fear as if they are dead. The seal of Rome that holds the tomb closed is broken, falls to the ground like a leaf in the fall, and the angel sits down on the stone in victory. The strength of Rome is shown to be irrelevant in light of God's power. Don't miss how easily the power of Rome, the power of the world, is tossed aside and neutralized. We serve an awesome God and should not live in fear of the world. Then we hear those needed words shared with the women, "Do not be afraid," words that release them from their fear and allow them to move and be fully present in the company of this magnificent angel, one whose appearance is like lightning with clothes as white as snow, both characteristics of the divine. The angel continues talking to the women, telling them that he knows they have come looking for Jesus who was crucified. The angel acknowledges that Jesus died on a cross in the past but continues on with the news that he has come to share, telling them that Jesus is not here. He is risen! Christ has risen! He has risen indeed! The angel invites them to come and see the empty tomb, to see the place where Jesus's body was laid and is no longer present. And after having verified that Jesus is gone, the women are to go and proclaim that Jesus has been raised from the dead! The women are to be witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus. They have seen the angel of the Lord. They have looked into the tomb and verified that the body is not there. And now they are to go and be the first to proclaim the news to Jesus' disciples. As members of the Church, those who believe in Jesus, these women now have a new task: to go and share the Good News that Christ has risen! He is risen indeed! The tomb is empty and Jesus is alive. They might not yet

understand what it means that the tomb is empty, but they will go and tell the disciples the Good News that Christ has risen! He is risen indeed!

Look at what the women do after the angel speaks to them: “they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.” Here we have the first people to share the Gospel, the Good News, running from the empty tomb to share the Good News that Christ has risen! He is risen indeed. Ladies, turn to someone this morning and tell them the Good News. Tell someone, “He is risen!”

As the women start running, they are greeted by Jesus! Notice how Jesus greets them. He uses a common greeting like our hello, not a greeting one would expect from someone who was dead and brought back to life. It seems to be one of those great understatement of Matthew’s Gospel. We would rather expect a “behold” or a “hallelujah” or some great rejoicing cry, but Jesus uses a very normal, gentle greeting. When the women hear Jesus, they come to him, fall at his feet, take hold of his feet, and worship him. We need to realize that by taking hold of Jesus’ feet the women are touching Jesus. Jesus has a physical body they can touch. Jesus is not a vision or an idea; he is a resurrected person who can be touched. Notice also that the women worship him and Jesus does not try to stop them from giving worship to him. The women may not yet understand that Jesus is God, but they give him their worship and he does not resist or correct them. Jesus’ words to them are to not be afraid, words that are similar to what the angel of the Lord has told them. And then Jesus tells them to go and tell “my brothers” to go to Galilee. There they will see Jesus. There is a shift in the manner in which Jesus addresses his disciples, now calling them his brothers. Jesus is recognizing his disciples as family members, those who have been adopted into his family through his death and resurrection. Those who believe in Jesus have been reconciled to God and are once again, through Jesus, in a loving relationship with God. The women go and find the disciples and share the Good News that Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! We should not miss that women are now part of spreading the Good News about Jesus. They came to the tomb to see the place where Jesus’ body was laid but left after seeing an empty tomb, an angel, and the risen Jesus. They left to go and tell others that they also can see Jesus. The women leave the tomb to go and tell others the Good News that Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Telling this Good News is a job of every believer. Not only did Jesus die on the cross for our sins, but he was resurrected that we might be reconciled to God.

We should ask ourselves on this Easter morning what it means to us that Jesus has been resurrected from the dead. That Jesus has been brought back from the dead in a physical body must mean something. If I were to take a survey of believers and ask them, “What does it mean for us today that Jesus is resurrected?” I would probably receive some interesting and insightful answers. Let’s look briefly at what it means to us today, 2000 plus years later, that Jesus was resurrected. It means that the crucifixion has been completed. That Jesus died on the cross and paid our debt to God for our sin is only part of the salvation story. The resurrection completes the crucifixion. Life did not end for Jesus with his death on the cross, but, by showing us that death has been defeated through his death and resurrection, we have sure and certain hope that we, as those who believe in and follow Jesus, will also be resurrected from the dead. Thomas Aquinas has provided a very concise summary of what it means for Christians that Jesus has been resurrected. First, he holds that justice required that the humbled be exalted. Jesus humbled himself and died on a cross. Jesus, the humble king who rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, loved us enough to stay on the cross and die in our place. His act of humility needs a response and that response is his resurrection. Next, resurrection points to Jesus’ divinity. The women who worship Jesus as God when they see him as they leave the empty tomb give us insight that Jesus is divine. Jesus is again present with the women, not as he was before his death, but as he is now as the first born from the dead. Jesus is God and is worthy of our worship. Next, because Jesus is raised from the dead, we also have hope that we who follow Jesus will be raised from the dead. Because of the witness of these two women, we now have sure and certain hope that we also will experience resurrection. Paul tells us in Romans 6:4 that we will die to sin and walk in the newness of life. Through Jesus we have victory over sin and we are able to be reborn, to be made new in Christ. And finally, it is only by the resurrection that God’s saving work on the cross is confirmed.ⁱⁱ We may be aware that Jesus died on the cross and bore the burden for our sins, but through the resurrection we have confirmation that Jesus’ words are true and that his action on the cross does free us from bondage to sin and death. We who seek to follow Christ because of the resurrection have hope that we also will be raised from the dead and live eternally reconciled to God, through Christ in the power of Holy Spirit. Resurrection brings hope with bounds that are unspeakable. Let us fall at Jesus’ feet, take hold of him in our hearts, and worship the one who paid for our sins on the cross, reconciled us to God, and gave us

confirmation through his resurrection of life eternal. Resurrection is why we can say with excitement that Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Pray with me: Jesus, we give thanks that you have given us such great Good News. Give us willing feet to go to others and share with them not just on Easter morning but always that Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon us, because he has anointed us to bring good news to the poor. He has sent us to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. Go forth into Jesus’ mission.

ⁱ A. T. Roberston quotes Cornelius à Lapide as saying, “The earth, which trembled with sorrow at the Death of Christ as it were leaped for joy at His Resurrection.”¹⁰

Wilkins, Michael J.. The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew (p. 937). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.

ⁱⁱ Oden, Thomas C.. Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology . HarperCollins. Kindle edition.