

Easter Sunday-April 9, 2023

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

Matthew 28:1-10

"He Has Been Raised" Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

It is always a joy for a preacher to see a large crowd of people on Easter morning just waiting to hear the good news once again that Jesus is risen from the dead. Although most of you have heard this story before and for some of you have heard it many times, you look forward to hearing it again today. But I wonder how many of you would have come here this morning if you had no idea what you were about to hear? On that first Easter, the women who came to the tomb expected to hear nothing at all. That is what usually happens when you go to a cemetery. But when Mary and the other Mary came to the tomb of Jesus, they weren't alone. They were met by a preacher and possibly two guards who were also there to witness the resurrection and to hear what this preacher had to say.

Crowds of people gathered around Jesus when he performed miracles. As you heard this past Holy Week, there were many people around Jesus when he was put on trial. There were even many people around Jesus as they watched him crucified. But on the first Easter, when Jesus did his greatest work of all and accomplished what he was sent into the world to do for you, there may have only been five at this first Easter service. I don't think it would have taken long to count the offering on the First Easter service.

I am pleased to see that there are no earthquakes, or more likely for us, no snowstorms this morning to keep you away from worshiping. But I don't think it was the earthquake that caused the low attendance on the first Easter morning. After all, on the first Easter Mary and Martha were not going to a church to worship Jesus or to hear a sermon. They were going to a cemetery where there is silence. That morning they intended to complete the quick job of embalming that had been done on Good Friday. They had work to do and they waited until the morning of the first day of the week so that they wouldn't be breaking any Sabbath rules, but it doesn't say they rushed to the tomb. They **went** to the tomb.

Instead of finding the stone that sealed the body of Jesus in the grave, they found an angel, a messenger from God sitting on this stone. The guards that had been assigned to guard the grave of Jesus looked as if they were the dead men and needed to be embalmed. The women who came to the tomb expected to find the stone against the tomb and had hoped that maybe these two men who were guarding the grave might be able to move the stone away so that they could enter the tomb and do their work.

But nothing was as these two women had expected things to be. The stone wasn't sealing the opening to the grave. There was an angel who was sitting on the stone, just waiting for a quorum of worshipers (whenever two or more or gathered in my name) to arrive so he could deliver his sermon. This angel had been given the words that this small congregation needed to hear. **"Do not be afraid"**. The angel knew that these women were looking for Jesus who wasn't where they expected him to be, and the angel knew that the guards were still speechless. These guards had just witnessed something they hadn't expected either. Instead of having to

stop grave robbers from approaching them, they should have been watching their backs as Jesus left the tomb. The angel knew that the women were confused. Nothing was as they expected. They were looking for Jesus who was dead. And instead, Jesus was the one searching for the women to tell them that he was risen.

Jesus had gone on from there, so he gave this message to the angel who just sat on the rock and preached. The angel told these women to look into the empty grave to see for themselves. The angel was right, Jesus was not there. He was not there, just as he said would happen three days after he was placed in the tomb. This message was not meant to simply be given to these women for their own information. The message they had received from them was meant to be spread by them. These women may have not rushed to the tomb that morning, but after the angel ordained these women as preachers, he told them to go quickly and tell this news that Jesus has risen to his disciples. The angel told these two women, "This is my message for you." But this also was the message that was to be spread to others.

These women who were told not to be afraid, still were experiencing fear, but they also were filled with great joy. This joy became even more overwhelming with the next unexpected turn of events on the first Easter. As they were running to find Jesus' disciples, Jesus found them and greeted them. Jesus' greeting was filled with great joy and from this one word from Jesus, they knew Jesus had been raised from the dead. After these two women worshiped Jesus, he sent them on their way to do what they had been told to do by the angel. Jesus started his message to these women with the same words that the angel had told them. "Do not be afraid; go tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

This is where today's reading ends. The disciples have not yet seen Jesus and they don't know what Jesus really is thinking about them. Their consciences had to be bothering them knowing that they deserted him at his crucifixion, and they deserved punishment. These disciples had not heard the angel or Jesus tell them, "Do not be afraid." And as they went to Galilee, I suspect that with each step away from Jesus, they became more afraid of what Jesus might say to them. But the good news continues to spread from the first Easter and is delivered by Jesus himself to his fearful disciples.

The women did what they were called to do on the first Easter. This message that Jesus is risen from the dead was then delivered to Jesus' disciples. They passed this good news on to other disciples. And for over 2000 years, the story continues to be told not just once a year, but at every Sunday worship service when congregations of people gather. Because Jesus rose from the grave, you too have risen from your death to begin living your new life in this world. You have been born from above in the waters of baptism and with that promise you leave this place with great joy and a calling to tell others of the good news that you have heard.

Where is Jesus today? He is not in a cemetery. He is here. His word has descended down to you today and he is here in the Lord's Supper to deliver to you the great news that your sins are forgiven and you are alive in Christ forever. Amen