

**Easter Sunday – April 20, 2014**  
**Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**

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**Matthew 28:1-10**

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. 2) There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3) His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. 4) The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. 5) 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; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. 7) Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you." 8) So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9) Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. 10) Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

In the name of our living Lord;

There's something refreshing about Easter – for some Easter means a new set of clothes or at least putting the winter shoes & purse away and wearing the spring ones. Just this week I noticed the crocus blooming and there are some tulips poking through the ground – that's certainly refreshing. Lately the birds have been a bit more noticeable – they've begun making their nests. The robins have been back for a while now. It was great to see them again after a long snowy winter. Maybe what's refreshing about Easter is the change of the season – it's spring time. Spring time gives us the hope that soon the dreary days of winter and the snow and the cold will be past. Spring time brings new life to the trees and the plants. And Spring time at least for me fills me with a renewed desire and enthusiasm to do things outdoors. It's like spring time gives us a new purpose. Yup there's something refreshing about Easter – that's for sure – and it's not all related to the change of seasons either.

If you worshiped with us this past Friday – you no doubt noticed a stark contrast between the rather quiet solemn atmosphere and the joyfulness of the service today. The black banners depicting the crucifixion and death of Jesus and the bare altar have been replaced by the sweet fragrance of our Easter lilies. In our excitement we've scheduled the service 2 hours earlier – it's like we couldn't wait to get here! Things are different, things are refreshing. Things are new.

That's Easter – Easter of course is more than just a spring ritual – it's a spiritual celebration. It's a celebration of the new relationship we have with our God.

**Theme: Easter really does make every thing new.**

- 1. You have a new hope in Christ.**
- 2. You have a new life in Christ.**
- 3. You have a new purpose in Christ.**

If we look at Easter through the eyes of the Mary's in our text we'll see how Easter makes everything new.

The two Mary's had been there on Good Friday watching the crucifixion of Jesus' from afar. They had followed Jesus and helped to take care of his needs. Now they felt so helpless and so hopeless. What could

they do to help? They watched anxiously as two strangers – Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea removed Jesus body from the cross and transported it to a garden and placed it in a cave shortly before sundown and the start of the Sabbath.

**Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb.**

No doubt they stayed as long as they could; wondering what they could do. But all too soon they had to depart to observe the Sabbath. Perhaps on their way home from the tomb they developed their plan – as soon as they could they would return – they would bring spices and they would complete the burial procedure – that was the least they could do for the one they loved, the one they had hoped would be the Messiah. Now those hopes were gone – buried with Christ in Joseph's tomb. How slowly the minutes and the hours seemed to pass as they waited.

Did they do what we do after a loved one has been taken from us through death? Did they comfort themselves with happy memories of things he had said and done? Did they recall how he had told his disciples that he would die in Jerusalem and rise on the third day? It doesn't appear so, at least not based on their actions. Jesus had told them this to give them hope but alas they failed to listen and believe. And their failures – their sins – caused them untold and unnecessary grief. Luke's Gospel tells us the sad story: **Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment. On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb.**

What must have begun as a rather somber quiet journey soon became anything but routine. For our text tells us: **There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.** As the earth trembled beneath their feet they had to wonder what it meant. The earth had trembled that Friday afternoon when Jesus died – God used it to announce the death of his Son and the defeat of sin. Matthew explains to us the reason for the quake – but the women were still in the dark at this time – an angel of the Lord had come down to open the tomb where Jesus had been buried – but now the tomb was empty! He had come to life! All that was left inside were his burial clothes. The quake announced the victory over death. Soon the angels would repeat that announcement in clear words to the women.

Unknown to the women, Jesus' enemies had requested a guard of soldiers to watch over the tomb so no one would be able to steal Jesus' body and fake his resurrection. Odd isn't it, how Jesus enemies put more stock in Jesus' announcement of his resurrection than his friends. At the appearance of the angel these Roman guards shook in fear and fainted. But that angel brought a message of hope to the Mary's calming their fears with their words: **"Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified."**

Do not be afraid – they had certainly had lots of reason for fear: They had seen the terrible crucifixion of Jesus. The Gospel accounts tell us that many of the disciples were afraid of the Jews who had arranged for Jesus' crucifixion. The earth moving under their feet was another cause for fear. The uncertainty of the future caused them to fear. They had just seen the huge stone standing away from the entry it was to block. And the grave was empty. They were afraid of what had happened to Jesus' body. And now they were face to face with a holy angel – fear because of their sin would have been the normal reaction. **Do not be afraid.** The words offered hope in addition to removing their fears.

So what is it that fills you with fears? Maybe you're a bit afraid of the politics in the workplace and the cut-throat nature exhibited by co-workers. Maybe it's just the uncertainty of the economy and the fear of what the future may or may not hold. As we look to the future there certainly are more questions than we have

answers for. What about our conscience? Does it fill us fear at times because of our sins? Like a long dreary winter, life can get pretty gloomy at times can't it? But like the tulips poking through the ground the angel's words, "**Do not be afraid,**" offer us a new hope in Christ.

This new hope in Christ removes our fears. Through the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus, God has removed the root cause of our fear of God. Jesus has paid for our sins and cleansed us from guilt so God tells us – stop being afraid. Easter offers us a new hope – there's an answer for the gloomies and it's found in the grace of God. The apostle Paul explains: (Romans 8:32) **He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?**

**I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. 6) He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.**

As the one who was crucified, Jesus completed the sacrifice for sin – he has won forgiveness for all. It's true that Jesus was crucified, died and was buried – but he's not like any of the others who had been crucified by the Roman soldiers. Jesus overcame death – he's not here! He's risen just as he said – see for yourselves. Who else has ever made and kept such a promise? What other world religion is based on a resurrection? Others have made the promise to come back from the dead but only Jesus has delivered. The real, physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus is clearly confirmed for us in the Bible.

Think of what this means. This means that every word Jesus has spoken is truth. His resurrection offers living proof that God the Father accepted Jesus payment for sins. His resurrection assures us that death has been conquered. His resurrection assures us of our resurrection, as Jesus promised – “Because I live, you also will live.”

Easter makes everything new – your risen Savior gives you new life. Because of Christ we now enjoy a new life with God instead of living a life in opposition to God. Our sins have been removed. We can count on God's blessings. We can be sure that the Lord will always deal with us in love. We can be sure that death will not hold us in the grave. We can be confident of our resurrection and of living together in eternal joy and glory with Christ. We can be sure of all this because Jesus has promised it and his resurrection proves he keeps his promises.

From the time of the angel's announcement to the women their lives were different. Things changed for them – and now they had something else to do. The day began without much hope and with no real purpose – but now the angel had given them hope in Christ, assured them of a new life with Christ and given them a new purpose: **go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."** 8) **So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.**

The empty grave had changed things for the Mary's. They didn't have to worry about rolling away the stone or finishing the burial of Jesus' body. The angel had a brand new purpose for them to carry out. They had a message to share. They were the first human beings to hear the best news the world has ever received. The Savior lives. They were to go quickly and tell the disciples the only news that could remove their gloom and doom, their guilt and despair. Jesus whom they had given up for dead was alive. He would meet his disciples in Galilee just as he had told them.

The woman hurried away – afraid yet filled with joy. We can certainly understand the combination of fear and joy as they left the empty tomb. There was a fear of weakness and wondering, “Is this really happening, and is Jesus really alive?” It seemed too good to be true. What if they woke up and discovered this was a dream? But then there was the joy – an angel had told them – he has risen from the dead! In this life

every Christian knows the tension between the fear of weakness and wondering and the joy produced by the gospel promises of forgiveness and new life.

As the women quickly set off to share the wonderful message given them by the angel – Jesus himself appeared to them. **Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. 10) Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."**

They were the first of many eye witnesses of the resurrected Lord. Jesus chose these ordinary everyday believers and told them to share the truth of his resurrection. You know that's still the best way to spread good news – one person tells another who tells another and so on. Go and tell that's really the new purpose that Easter has given to us.

When the women saw Jesus they fell at his feet – and then they worshipped him. They touched him and saw with their own eyes that the one who had died was alive again. And they heard Jesus repeat the words of the angel – Do not be afraid. There are some fears in life that only Jesus can remove – the fear of sin, the fear of guilt, the fear of wondering what comes after death. In Jesus those fears are all removed – he lives to silence all our fears!

Jesus then sent the women on their journey to tell the disciples. He wanted them to know that he regarded them as brothers – that he was alive and that they would see him again. They had abandoned him in Gethsemane. Peter had denied him three times. Most of them were hiding in fear when he was crucified. They were filled with doubts about Jesus' promise to rise. They would refuse to believe what the women would tell them – yet Jesus calls them brothers. They were forgiven in full – they had been restored to the family of God.

Easter proclaims that same sweet comfort for all to hear and to trust today. After all of the sins we have done that would rightly remove us from God's family forever, the living Savior says: "You are forgiven. Welcome to my family." You are sons and daughters of God. You are my beloved brothers and sisters. This is the good news of the empty tomb. Easter means forgiveness for yesterday, new life as a child of God for today and life forever in heaven.

Yup there's something refreshing about Easter, all right. Easter makes everything new. You have new hope in Christ. You have new life in Christ and you have a new purpose in Christ.

Amen.