

April 9, 2023
The Resurrection of our Lord (Easter Day)
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Matthew 28:1-10

HE IS NOT HERE, FOR HE HAS RISEN JUST AS HE SAID.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

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

Our text for meditation today comes from the Gospel according to St Matthew, the 28th chapter, which you heard read earlier.

Earthquakes are one of the most powerful and destructive forces on earth. In the Old Testament, earthquakes almost always point to the presence and the intervention of God among men, demonstrating His power and might as the God of the covenant – and revealing Himself as the righteous Judge in His wrath. (cf: Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel, 1128)

On the day that Pontius Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified, Jesus is abandoned by God the Father into the hands of sinful men. The righteous Judge poured out His entire wrath against sin on His only begotten Son on Calvary’s cross. As Jesus breathed His last and gave up His spirit, St Matthew records:

“... behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split.” (Matthew 27:51)

The earthquake and the split rocks indicate the presence of God at the death of His Son giving His approval of Jesus’ work of salvation. It was as if the earth heaved and tossed as if it were in grief that God Himself who created all things had died.

Those few followers of Jesus who were brave enough to witness His crucifixion must have been overwhelmed with shock, confusion, and fear. But there was no time to mentally process the tragic events because the Sabbath was about to begin. Joseph of Arimathea took Jesus’ body down from the cross, wrapped the body in a clean linen shroud, laid it in his own tomb, and rolled a great stone to cover the entrance. (cf: Matthew 27:57–61) The women who had followed Jesus saw the tomb and how His body was laid – and left to prepare spices and ointments to anoint the body after the Sabbath. (cf: Luke 23:55–56)

The women were miserable because the One whom they thought was the King of the Jews, was now dead. And what good is a *dead* king? A dead king cannot make decrees. A dead king cannot

release prisoners from their chains or forgive peasants the debts they owe the kingdom. A dead king is of no use.

Due to the sinfulness that you and I inherited from Adam, and those sins that we ourselves have committed, we are sinful peasants in need a King, a real living King. You need a King who can reconcile you with your heavenly Father and decree that you are righteous in His sight. You need a King who can unlock the chains that bind you in the prison of your suffering and sorrow, your trials and temptations. You need a King who can forgive you of the wages of your sin and transgression.

Unbeknownst to the women and Jesus' disciples, their King Jesus was only resting in the tomb. God finished His work of the original Creation on the sixth day, and on the seventh He rested. The eighth day represented a new beginning. Christ Jesus finished His work of the new creation by redeeming the world with His blood on the sixth day, Good Friday. On the Sabbath, the seventh day, He rested in the tomb. On the eighth day, Sunday, the first day of the week, it was the first day of the new creation. St Matthew records:

“And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.” (Matthew 28:2)

The Sunday morning earthquake links with Good Friday. Whatever God had accomplished on Friday, there was more to do. The Friday earthquake did not mark the end of God's work. The second earthquake signifies the effects of Jesus death has produced something higher and greater. Concordia Commentary writer Dr Jeffrey Gibbs points out that this Sunday earthquake is the only one mentioned by St Matthew that does not communicate only danger or judgment. Gibbs writes:

“In this earthquake, there is divine victory and proof of a new life and of promises kept.” (Gibbs, Matthew 21:1–28:20, Concordia Commentary, 1604)

The earthquake and then the angel. Angels show up at every major step in God's plan of salvation. They are messengers from God that appeared to many of God's people in the Bible to announce good news (Judges 13:3) or instruct, (Acts 7:38; Galatians 3:19) warn of danger, (Genesis 19:15) or guard from evil. Jesus says that angels accompany will Him at His triumphant return on the Last Day. (cf: Matthew 25:31) This particular angel is tasked calling Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to be something that was unimaginable in their culture. They were to be eyewitnesses. Putting the women at ease and reassurance, the angel said:

“Do not be afraid... ..you seek Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here, for he has risen, as he said... .. go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead...” (Matthew 28:5–7)

On that bright first Easter morning the crucified Lord rose from His rest in the tomb. Jesus, true God and true man, united in body and soul, descended to personally preach to the captives in Hell, declaring victory over sin, death, and the power of the devil. (cf: 1 Peter 3:18–19) Satan had been defeated through the life, suffering, and death of God in the flesh. The gates of hell cannot prevail against the crucified and resurrected Christ Jesus.

A dead king is of no use, so God raised up Christ our King to be our raised King of Kings. God raised the crucified King from the dead, accepting His sacrifice as payment for your sins and the sins of all mankind. For those who trust and believe in King Jesus for salvation, their transgressions are covered by the blood of the Lamb shed on the altar of the cross. By His resurrection, you too, might be raised from the dead and reign with Him in eternal life.

The resurrected King Jesus has reconciled you with the Father and declared you righteous in His sight. He has broken the chains of your trials and temptations. And for His sake, your heavenly Father declares you justified... just as if you never sinned. You are no longer a peasant but an heir of Christ's eternal kingdom.

Many people think of God as an angry God. But He is a God of infinite love and mercy. It was Jesus' love for you that held Him to Calvary's cross. It was the Father's love for you that turned His back on His own Son as He hung on the cross in your place. Some call it the great exchange. Jesus lived the perfect, sinless life in exchange for the one you could not. Jesus died your death in exchange for the death you deserve. Jesus resurrection is proof of a future exchange. St Paul tells us this old worn out body will one day be exchanged. He says:

"... the Lord Jesus Christ... will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body..." (Philippians 3:19-20)

The resurrection tells us that everything Jesus taught is true and every promise is eternally valid. All that stuff about how much God loves you? ***It is true!*** Those Words about eternal life and living with Him in glory? ***It is true!*** The promise that even though you will die – that one day you will rise from the grave and live forever? ***It is true!***

Does that mean that life will always be fun and easy – like a walk through the rose garden? No. In our heavenly Father's hidden wisdom, He works in mysterious ways as he brings about faith and trust in Christ Jesus through suffering. Suffering causes you stop trusting in yourself and cling to the grace of Christ so that you take up your own cross and learning from, and follow after Jesus. (cf: Matthew 16:24–26) Your crosses do not save you or anyone else, but they convey the love of Christ to others in a sinful world of suffering. (cf: Kolb, *The Christian Faith: A Lutheran Exposition*, 27) God's Word teaches that the righteous live by faith. (cf: Romans 1:17) God never promised riches, wealth, or good health in this life. His grace is sufficient for you. His power is made perfect in weakness. (cf: 2 Corinthians 12:9)

What God has promised you is that everlasting riches and joy are found in Christ Jesus and in the life to come. God's angel says to you: "*Do not be afraid.*" You have God's promise that He has everything under control, working all things together for good for those who trust and believe, even in what appears to you as tragedy and disaster.

Brothers and sister in Christ, rejoice! The stone is still rolled back from the entrance to the tomb and the tomb is still empty. Unless Jesus returns real soon, His tomb is a glimpse of your grave after Christ's return on the Last Day. You can rejoice every Sunday because every Lord's Day is the day of Jesus' resurrection.

Just as the resurrected King Jesus met His disciples in Galilee, it is right here in the Divine Service and wherever two or three are gathered in His Name, that He comes to you. He comes to you in the preaching of the Gospel to create and strengthen your faith. (cf: Romans 10:17) He comes to you in the daily remembrance of your Baptism to assure you of the promises He made you in the washing of the water and the Word – that you are marked as one redeemed by Christ the crucified and adopted into His holy family. He comes to you in His Holy Supper in His body and blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins and to strengthen you in body and soul to endure to sorrow, suffering, trials, and tribulations in this life.

The tomb is empty. Do not be afraid. Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.