

We just heard St. Matthew's account of Easter Sunday. 10 short verses. And yet, remarkably dense, remarkably compact. Those 10 verses tell us just about all we need to know about the Resurrection. Not just up here (head), but in here as (heart) well.

So, let's take another look at them this morning, not just with the eyes that are attached to our brains, but with the eyes of our hearts as well. The good news Matthew brings us is not just about some historical event that happened one morning almost 2,000 years ago. This is good news you can use in 2023.

Matthew begins chapter 28 by telling us about Mary Magdalene and the other Mary coming to the tomb on Sunday morning. Just a few verses before, these same women were present at the crucifixion. They were also present at the burial. In fact, at the end of ch27, you get the sense that these women are just overwhelmed. The tomb is closed. There's a terrible finality to the "boom" as the stone is rolled into place. And the last thing Matthew says is that the men go home and these women are still sitting there, opposite the tomb.¹ I picture them sitting there on Friday evening, in the darkening twilight, absolutely and utterly stunned.

And 36 hours later, in ch 28, they are returning to the tomb. In the quiet stillness of a spring morning, they go to the tomb of their teacher to grieve in peace and solitude. And Matthew says, "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. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow."²

An angel and an earthquake. The Greek word for earthquake is "seismos," from which we get the word, "seismic." And yet, seismic has come to mean something more than just pertaining to an earthquake. We also use it to mean something that is strong, or widespread, or of a huge impact. We talk about great changes in our society as seismic changes.

The word, "earthquake" or "seismos" appears only twice in the accounts of Jesus' death and resurrection. And both those times are in Matthew. One was in our Gospel reading last week from Mt ch27.

Last week, we heard about an earthquake at the moment of Jesus' death. The earth shakes, rocks are split. Some tombs crack open. And, when the Roman Centurion and his men see the earthquake, they say, "Truly this man was God's Son." Matthew wants us to know. This is no ordinary crucifixion. Jesus' death on Good Friday is something extraordinary, something earthshaking.

And now, on Easter morning, Matthew says there is a "great earthquake." Literally in Greek, a "seismos megas," a mega-earthquake. Plus there's that angel with lightning clothes.

So much for a quiet morning grieving at the grave of your friend. If you start the morning with an earthquake and the appearance of an angel, you won't need coffee to get your heart going. The adrenaline will start it pumping all on its own.

¹ Mt 27:61

² Mt 28:2-3

And then Matthew adds, "For fear of (the angel) the guards shook and became like dead men."³ Do you get the joke? The guards became like dead men? These were the guys who had been stationed at the tomb to keep Jesus' dead corpse inside the tomb. They had sealed up the stone. And they were standing watch to make sure that nothing happened.

And then, one angel and one earthquake later, the seal is broken, the tomb is opened, and the guards are all so overcome with fear that they appear to be dead themselves. The irony is delicious.

And think of the women. If the big burly macho guards are lying around in a dead faint in front of the angel sitting on top of the stone, the women have got to be at least a little bit apprehensive themselves.

But the angel addresses them: "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay."⁴

'Step right up ladies. And watch your step around those fainted guards. Take a peek inside the tomb. The former tenant has vacated the premises. And what's more, ladies, he has left a message and a forwarding address.'

The angel says, "Go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.'"⁵

'Tell his disciples to go and see him. Not in this empty tomb. He is risen. Tell the disciples that he will meet them in their home territory, back in Galilee.'

That's a wonderful message to send via these women. And we can get so taken by the message that we miss one astounding thing about it. Two words: "his disciples." Now, if we were really paying attention, we wouldn't let that one slide by.

Disciples? What disciples? The last time Matthew mentioned disciples was on Thursday night when Jesus was arrested. He says, "Then all the disciples deserted him and fled."

Disciples? What disciples? By definition, a disciple is someone who follows a teacher. Well, these guys ditched their teacher. One of them betrayed the teacher and hung himself. One of them swore that he didn't know who Jesus was. And the other 10 dropped out, turned tail, and embarked on an early and permanent spring break.

Disciples? By definition, Jesus had no disciples left. And yet, that's the word the Angel uses. What tremendous love and grace and forgiveness is implied in that word.

³ Mt 28:4

⁴ Mt 28:5-6

⁵ Mt 28:7

They dropped out. But Jesus didn't drop them. 'Go and tell Jesus' disciples that he will meet them.' What a tremendous message of comfort for the women to take to those 11 men.

Matthew continues: "So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples."⁶ Notice those emotions. Fear, yes. But also great joy. Literally, mega-joy.

And as if that's not enough, "Suddenly Jesus met them and said, 'Greetings!'" What an amazing thing. They're heading off to do what they're told to do. And as they're doing it, Jesus comes to them. And what do they do? Matthew says, they go to him, they take hold of his feet, and they worship him.⁷

They hadn't ever worshipped him before. They had followed him. They had helped him. They had mourned him. But now things have switched. Their old behavior is no longer enough. The women fall at Jesus' feet. They grab onto him, they hug him as hard as they can. And they worship him. The women begin to treat Jesus the same way they used to treat only God himself.

And then Jesus has some instructions for them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."⁸

Two wonderful things here in Jesus' words. First, "Do not be afraid." 'You had fear and great joy. Drop the fear. Hold on to the mega-joy.'

Second, notice what he calls the disciples. Remember, they didn't even deserve to be called disciples after the way they acted.

But Jesus addresses them in a new way. He calls them by a new term: "Brothers." What amazing love and grace and forgiveness in that word. Brothers.

They didn't even deserve to be his followers. And yet Jesus gives them a new status. Through his death and resurrection, they can become adopted members of his family. His brothers. Children of God. Heirs of eternal life.

10 short verses of Matthew's Gospel. And yet such good news. For the disciples. And for all of us.

The question remains, how will you react to this good news? Or to put it another way, who are you most like in this story?

Some of you may be like the guards. You may be operating under the assumption that God is something to insulate yourself from. You may prefer keep Jesus cold and dead. You may do everything you can to keep that stone sealed up between you and him. Just know that God has the power to roll away that stone. Just know that God is alive and active. God has

⁶ Mt 28:8

⁷ Mt 28:9

⁸ Mt 28:10

intervened in the world by raising Jesus from the dead. You can fall into a dead faint of indifference. But that doesn't change the reality of God's presence in the world. Ask him to roll away the stone in your heart, and he will.

Some of you may be like the disciples. You may have followed Jesus at some time during the past. But you haven't stuck with him. You abandoned him somewhere along the way. To you, Jesus says, "Go tell my brothers and sisters that I will meet them." The possibility for a new and deeper relationship with Jesus is always there. Through his cross, through his resurrection, he offers forgiveness. Open your heart to him. Seek him out. And he will find you.

Some of you may be like the women. Maybe you've followed Jesus for some time. But now, you have the opportunity to deepen your relationship with him. Maybe you've been afraid. There are many kinds of fears in life. Fear of separation, fear of loss of control, fear of illness or injury. But they almost always boil down to one common denominator: fear of death. Hear the good news. Jesus is risen. And through his death and resurrection he offers you new and eternal life.

If death is factored out of the equation, there's no reason to be afraid. Release your fear, and live into the joy of the new life that Jesus brings.

Or maybe you've just held Jesus at arm's length. If so, the women are a good role model. They fall at Jesus feet. They hold onto him just as hard as they can. And they offer genuine and heartfelt worship.

The good news the angel brings is for you:

I know you are looking for Jesus.

He is not dead.

He has been raised.

He will meet you.

Do not be afraid.

Fall at his feet, embrace him, and worship him.