

Ben Libby
 Sermon
 April 12th, Easter Sunday

To Jesus Christ, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification, be glory forever, Amen!

The Word of the LORD which forms a portion for our sermon text this morning comes to us from Matthew 28, the first 8 verses:

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 Suddenly, there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, and going to the tomb, he rolled away the stone and was sitting on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. 4 The guards were so terrified of him that they shook and became like dead men. 5 The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid! I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. 6 He is not here. He has risen, just as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. 7 Go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has risen from the dead! And look, he is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see him.' See, I have told you!" 8 They hurried away from the tomb, with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

The Seismic Shift from Sin to Salvation

- I. What started off as a day of mourning...**
- II. Turned into a moment of fear...**
- III. But ended as a day of great joy**

This is the Word of The LORD!!! ~~The congregation may be seated...~~

Mercy, Grace, and Peace ARE YOURS from your God and Father and from your Savior from sin, Jesus Christ. Dear fellow Redeemed

Things can sure change quickly. Isn't that just how life works? When we make future plans about what we want to do in our lives in general, we like to take our time. We draw up and imagine all these long, detailed, and in-depth plans. But most times in life, the biggest changes that affect our lives happen quite quickly. An accident or an injury can happen in the blink of an eye and change our lives forever. A big piece of life-changing news can be all of a sudden dropped on us. We like to take our time with how we want life to play out. The reality is that life can and does change in an instant!

Take the first Easter Sunday for example. That was a day that changed dynamically and rapidly. It started

out with women traveling to the tomb of Jesus. They were trudging along, with oils and perfumes in hand to anoint the dead body of Jesus. Yet, when they arrived, there was not a body to be found! He was gone! Had someone stolen the body of Jesus? What was going on? Their day, and subsequently, their lives were all about to change!

Yes, things still change quickly today. If this pandemic has taught us anything, it has taught us that. It wasn't so long ago that we were regularly gathering here for worship. But that has since changed. The news changes quickly. Things that were printed in one day's paper can be completely different

by the next day. Everything shifts and changes fast. Easter is the epitome of that but in a good way!

There is a detail here that perhaps you missed, but if you were there you certainly would've noticed it. There was a great earthquake that took place, the cause of which was an angel. There were, in fact, 2 earthquakes that happened during holy week, one on Good Friday and the one here on Easter morning. The Good Friday earthquake is described for us in Matthew 27: **Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, 52 and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; 53 and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.**

These two seismic incidents not only bookend the most important weekend in the history of the world, but they also are representative of the change that had taken place. When earthquakes occur, they tend to change the landscape. They can change so drastically, it can be hard to even remember how it used to look. And that is exactly what happened with the after-shock of the Savior's resurrection. The spiritual landscape of the world would be changed forever, and the ultimate result of that change is to the benefit of the one who believes **He has risen, just as he said.** And so we pray: MAY THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH AND MEDIATIONS OF OUR HEARTS BE ACCEPTABLE IN YOUR SIGHT, O LORD, MY MAKER AND REDEEMER, AMEN!!!

How long does it take? That is a question that I find asking when reading through the resurrection accounts. How long did it take these women to arrive at the tomb? How long did it take for Marry Magdalene to find Peter and John? How long did it take for Peter and John to sprint to the tomb?

How long does it take? I am not talking about logistics, rather emotional recovery... How long would it take for the people who believed that Jesus was the Messiah to get over His death? Well, if you were counting on Him to function as your Messiah and to save you, you would've been crushed! This was the

One, but He had just been murdered! You can hear the disappointment in the words of the Emmaus Disciples: **"But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. (Luk 24:21 NKJ)** Those disciples could not see that death didn't mean defeat for Jesus, rather His death would be how their death would be defeated!

For these women who rose early that Sunday to come to the tomb, no doubt they too were grief-stricken. Jesus had just died on Friday, and that Saturday they couldn't come to His grave because it was the Sabbath day. So, the very first chance they got to bury their Lord properly, they took. They were so preoccupied with everything that happened, they had forgotten that there was a huge stone in between them and their goal that day. That was a fact they wouldn't remember until they were already on the way to the tomb...

When we are consumed by grief, even the simplest task can be overwhelming. When a loved one dies, how long does it take for life to resemble normalcy once again? Well, people grieve in different ways. Some need more time to heal than others. It doesn't make it right or wrong. Death is unnatural, and it is the worst side effect of sin that we can experience on this earth. It takes time to move on.

How long did it take to get over Jesus' death? In this particular case, we can be specific. It took 3 days to get over the death of Jesus because that is how long before He wasn't dead anymore! **The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid! I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. 6 He is not here. He has risen, just as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.**

Whenever an angel shows up in the Bible, usually one of the first things they say is something like this angel says. **"Do not be afraid!"** Angels usually have to issue disclaimers like this because humans are often afraid of things they deem to be "supernatural". Angels are supernatural in the sense that they are rarely seen. But that doesn't mean they are scarce or uncommon. We just don't see them. It doesn't mean they aren't around us all the time.

But when you do see them, they do typically make an impression. Take this instance for example. From other accounts in the Gospels, it seems that there are 2 angels, but in Matthew's Gospel only 1 of them speaks. Matthew describes the Angel and he also speaks to how the soldiers guarding the tomb reacted. **His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. 4 The guards were so terrified of him that they shook and became like dead men**

What a fitting contrast we have here. The women were expecting to find the dead body of Jesus being guarded by soldiers and blocked by a huge stone. What they instead found was the soldiers shaking and trembling like they were dead, no sign of a dead Jesus, and the tomb door being reclined on by an angel! When they finally got the message from this angel, they did the only thing there was to do, what they were told: **7 Go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has risen from the dead! And look, he is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see him.' See, I have told you!"**

Jesus rose from the dead. That is why we celebrate Easter. It is Easter Sunday that makes the previous Friday "Good". Yes, Jesus tragically died on the cross. But then, 3 days later He rose from the dead! That was the reason the women ran from there with both fear and joy. They had to find the disciples! This was amazing!

But I am sure this news is not that shocking *to you*. After all, we know Jesus rose from the dead! This is not our first Easter. We all know that Jesus rose from the dead. We read these readings every Easter. But just because this is familiar does not minimize how incredible this is.

Jesus predicted He would rise from the dead. It was out there. Yet, the disciples couldn't fathom that actually would happen. All throughout the resurrection accounts, there is this overarching attitude of disbelief. That's not to say the people experiencing the first Easter were unbelieving, rather it is more of a sense of "this is too good to be true!" You can see why they might have felt like that. After all, it's not something that happens every day.

Yes, this news that the angel delivered to the women was truly *groundbreaking!* Literally, the ground broke when the angel rolled the stone away. Quite ironically, the only people who took Jesus' hints at resurrection seriously were people who hated Him! That's what those guards were doing there in the first place. It was the Pharisees who approached Pilate and said: **"Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise.' 64 Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead.' So the last deception will be worse than the first."** **Matthew 27:63-64** They were afraid that the disciples would steal the body and claim resurrection. They did not expect it to actually happen!

Yes, there was a great deal of fear on this first Easter. The Pharisees were afraid the disciples would come and steal the body. The guards who were assigned to guard His body were afraid of what actually happened to Him. The women who heard the angel were afraid too, but that fear was soon accompanied by great joy!

8 They hurried away from the tomb, with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

What are the implications of the fact that Jesus rose from the dead? There are many, and most of them are still a factor to this day. But first, let's address the people who were at the tomb and what the implications were for them.

For the guards, who literally were left shaking in their boots, they needed a cover story. If they were sleeping on the job, and the disciples did come and steal Jesus away, it would mean not only their jobs but also their heads. It is therefore ironic that this is the story they went with. They, of course, would be protected by the Pharisees with this lie, and sadly it was accepted and perpetuated down to the people. The real truth was that they weren't sleeping on the job. The dead had been raised and there was nothing these soldiers were going to do about it.

For the women, it meant that they no longer had any reason to be either at the tomb or grieving anymore. There was no reason to seek the living Christ at the empty tomb. He is risen! He was and remains very much alive. Now the only purpose they had was to find people and tell them the good news!

And, of course, there is a much more important and far-reaching result of the fact that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. What happened on Easter has an eternal and lasting effect on every single one of us!

Peter wrote about it in our epistle reading this morning: **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.** Paul also goes into great detail about it in 1 Corinthians 15: **And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! 18 Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. 20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. 23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.**

The fact of the matter is that Jesus' resurrection is so fundamental to our faith, that if it did not happen (as Paul theorizes) then we would not only be fools but damned fools at that. We would still be in our sins if Jesus was not raised. Death in this world truly would be the end, we would have no hope.

But thanks be to God that Jesus was raised. Because of this undeniable fact, we too shall rise at the last day.

Yes, things can change all really quickly. It took only 3 days to go from a dead and defeated Jesus to a risen and triumphant conqueror. The shift was quick. It was also enduring. It means we too have defeated death through Him. Good Friday means nothing without Easter Sunday. The two events are crucially connected. They are marked by 2 separate and distinct earthquakes. They would have been unmistakable if you were there. Both events are unmistakable for us who weren't there because they mean that we are forgiven, it is finished, and will live forevermore.

Have you ever seen pictures of before and after earthquakes? It is quite interesting. Most earthquakes are minor and don't cause that much damage. But the bigger ones can make quite a change in just a few minutes. Look at the before pictures, and you will see nice buildings and roads standing as they should be. But then glance over to the after pictures, and they look nothing like the structures that once stood in their place. All that is left is rubble and remnants of what used to be!

This is also the case with Easter. The earthquake that occurred that day was big, Matthew calls it a **great earthquake**. But the real change was not physical, it was spiritual! The fault lines were drawn. The fault of our sin was placed on Jesus on Friday, and on Sunday our victory over sin and death was assured by Jesus! The before and after is quite a stark contrast! Before that weekend, we were sinful and doomed to death. After that weekend, we were saved! This is indeed a Seismic Shift! As we said in our psalm this morning, **The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; Yes, I have a good inheritance. (Psa 16:6 NKJ)**

Easter is not only a joyful day, it is THE most joyful day ever! Jesus was dead but then He wasn't! The seeming catastrophe that was His death was flipped on its head! We also are joyful because His victory means ours as well!

Yet, it can still take some time for us to get adjusted to it. It takes time to move on from death. If you have ever lost someone close to you, then you know this to be true. Life itself seems to have changed. Suddenly,

someone who meant a great deal to you is gone, and there is a void that cannot be filled. It takes time to adjust to death. But, the answer to death didn't take that much time at all. All it took was 3 days for sin and death to be conquered forever!

Paul goes on in 1 Corinthians 15 to the conclusion of what the ultimate result of the resurrection means. **For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." 55 "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1Co 15:53-57 NKJ)**

Because Jesus lives, so too shall we. Yes, we will all have to grapple and experience death in some way, shape, or form. This world is full of it. But because Jesus rose from the dead that Easter morning, we too shall rise on the last day! The conclusion of Job is now our reality, **For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth; 26 And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God, 27 Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me! (Job 19:25-27 NKJ)**

Yes, in these days, everything seems like it is all subject to change. The ever-changing variables of this world make for sadness and fear. But there is a constant. No matter what, Jesus rose from the dead. No matter what happens to us now, our ultimate victory is secured. We will conquer death, the proof of that victory was there that day in that empty tomb! All praise and thanks be to Jesus Christ, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification! AMEN!!!