Matthew 28:10a Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid.”

Honestly, I can only imagine what was going on in the disciples’ minds. Jesus, the one they thought was the Messiah, was dead. Well, that’s what they had been told. I say told because the only one of them that was at the cross was John. John and just about everyone else told them that Jesus was dead. Some of the women had witnessed the death. They saw and heard that moment when Jesus cried out, **“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!”** They heard that and saw Jesus take his last breath and, well, they literally, truly, really saw him die!

I have no doubt they also heard the centurion’s confession (and all those with him). They felt the earthquake and later on probably heard of the torn Temple curtain. Eventually, they were made of aware of greater activity at the cross. The soldiers were going to do something. The women watched as the first thief’s legs were broken and heard his cries of anguish. Then they watched as the second thief’s legs were broken. All of this to speed their deaths. Yet the soldiers get to Jesus and they don’t swing the mallet to break his legs. Some sort of short discussion goes on and then they watch as one of the soldiers approaches Jesus and stabs him with a spear, right below the rib cage, up toward the heart. It would have been a totally fatal blow had Jesus been alive but that piercing made it clear that Jesus was dead, because Jesus did exactly what the dead do in such circumstances: nothing! Nothing happened! The dead do nothing! And so the dead Jesus is then taken down from the cross.

We are also told that the women followed that body of Jesus. They saw it was given to a man, we know it was Joseph of Arimathea, but it is possible the women don’t actually know the man. They follow to see what will happen with the body. They see the body prepared quickly for burial. And I want you to know that they are not pleased. They don’t think that the preparations were complete or proper because on Sunday morning they are headed there with more spices, no doubt to “Do a proper job,” for Jesus. They see where the body is laid. They see how the tomb is closed up. Then they go back to their homes.

The disciples? Oh, them, they are in hiding. They are filled with fear. I am sure that in their minds they are reasoning that if the Religious leadership hated Jesus enough to get him killed they were next on the schedule. It is clear they had a meeting place, a home, a house somewhere in the city. It seems the majority of them were there. Hiding. Afraid. Disturbed. Distressed. Grieving, deeply grieving for two reasons: Jesus is dead and I am sure they are also grieving because of how they had been duped. They had come to believe that Jesus was the Son of God, the very fulfillment of the centuries old faith they belonged to and now that hope was dead too. Dead with the dead Jesus. Three years of their lives wasted, following, foolishly following a now dead guy! Oh, they talked among themselves but I don’t think there were lots of encouraging words spoken among them as they hid and worried that they were next!

I can imagine that Friday night and all of Saturday and even Sunday morning were all a bit surreal for them. A kind of “what in the world has happened!” stupor. Distressed. Disappointed. Afraid!

But, my dear people, something is about to change. No, that is not strong enough! EVERYTHING is going to change! It is going to change because of what happens on this Sunday Morning. Let’s remind ourselves of just what is as we contemplate our text under the theme: HE HAS RISEN!

Again I can only imagine the thoughts of the women as they rose early and got ready to go to the tomb of Jesus to finish up things nicely for him. Lots of discussion, including the most important question uttered as they make their way to the tomb. **“Who will roll the stone away from the entrance to the tomb for us?”** That’s an important question. Important because it tells us that the women and thus probably the disciples knew nothing at all of the guards posted and the tomb being sealed to prevent its opening. That tells you there was no plot or plan among the disciples, including these women, about stealing the body and pretending something was going on. That question shows the innocence of the disciples as to what was being considered by others. Never crossed their minds, is what we can surmise.

By the way, it is also evident that the earthquake of that morning was not felt by the women, for surely they would have been asking: “Do you think the stone was knocked away by the earthquake?” That’s also the reason they are quite surprised to find the stone already rolled away. And if you would, my own personal understanding of what took place. As they approached the tomb, they saw the two angels, one more or less was walking away and the other went into the tomb. The women then drew nearer, afraid. They go into the tomb and see the angel. When they come outside that is when they see they see Jesus. The glorified Jesus is really the second angel. Most of the women now head to the disciples and Jesus at this point speaks with Mary as she hangs around more. Either way, the ladies heard that wonderful announcement of the angel: **“You are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here. He has risen, just as he said….** And then the women met Jesus outside the tomb and that is when Jesus said to them: **“Do not be afraid. Go, tell my brothers that they should go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”**

So let’s just contemplate all the more these words and the events. The angel’s words are very clear and precise. You are looking for Jesus, not any old Jesus, but the one who had been crucified, died and had been buried here. In truth, this angel was gently directing them to think differently, because in reality the women had come looking for the body of Jesus, looking for the dead, lifeless Jesus but the angel is clearly directing them to the fact they should be looking for an alive Jesus! For that matter, Luke records the words this way: **“Why are you looking for the living among the dead?”** And with that the angel makes one of the boldest, most wonderful, earth shattering proclamations there is! **“He is not here! He has risen!** Again let’s take a closer look at those words.

He is not here! Here means the grave, inside the tomb because that’s what the women expected. But, He, Jesus is not in the tomb. And then the angel says, “He has risen!” Again the women expected a dead body, a dead Jesus. The only thing this angel could be saying and clearly telling them is that the Jesus they thought dead was not dead but had risen from that death and was now out and about. He has risen. Risen from the dead. In other words, Jesus is alive!

And then realize that as the women go out of the tomb, there is Jesus himself to meet them. They saw Jesus. Mary saw and spoke directly to Jesus. For that matter, for the next 40 days, Jesus is going to make appearance after appearance to many, many people, and it seems that many people are going to see Jesus ascend into heaven too. If there is one thing that is absolutely clear, the angels and what they said is a complete and absolute truth: **Jesus has risen from the dead!**

I have to tell you, dear people, that there are many out there who claim to be “Christian” but in truth they do not believe or accept the words of the angels, or Jesus, the disciples, or the words of the Bible as true. They want to tell you about spiritual life, a new life in Jesus, a new way of looking at things and how from this point on the disciples did just that, they took the dead Jesus and after much contemplation they decided that it would be better if they kept the ideas, the thoughts and teachings of Jesus alive and thus was born the modern Christian faith. It is about new life, about hope and how this guy Jesus showed us that by working hard and being cool. Jesus showed us we could make an impact on the lives around us and the world can be a better place! And then they will tell you that this supposedly savvy and cool Jesus stupidly got himself arrested and killed by the Romans, really just an unfortunate accident. Seriously, just writing that summary of what many modern churches teach about Jesus hurts my head and heart. Because here is truth:

If Jesus died and stayed dead and his “resurrection” is nothing more than some sort of spiritual adventure for you to take, then what a sad and foolish thing faith in Jesus is. Because if Jesus is not alive, actually and physically alive before these ladies and the disciples, then the following things are true: The Bible is a lie, composed of nothing but lies. Jesus was totally crazy because he is still dead and most of what He taught is just garbage. The ladies lied. The disciples lied. The majority of the people in the land of Israel who claim to have seen Jesus lied. Thus the miracles of Jesus are a lie. His whole life is a lie. And if all of this is the truth, then what in the world are you doing following Jesus because it is all a lie! Sorry, liberal churches, the best you can come up with is that Jesus had a great message about how we really can, you know, like the little engine that could? What absolute and complete trash. You have abandoned the faith. You have gutted God of His majesty and truth. You have shamed the name of Jesus!

Because the Bible is true. The women spoke the truth. The angels spoke the truth. The Disciples themselves will speak and affirm absolutely the truth: Jesus has risen from the dead. Jesus has truly, physically and actually come back to life and Jesus lives and rules now and for all eternity.

Now, the members of my congregation know, that no Easter morning comes along without Pastor Balogh hammering at and focusing on the three great lessons of the resurrection. If you were a student in my confirmation classes you should have had burned into your head those truths, because once question 201 and its answers got taught, you were told you were responsible for the answers anytime the question was asked and if you didn’t know the answer you got more work! You were reminded again and again that this question and its answers are the heart and core of our Christian faith. So here goes.

201: Of what does Christ’s resurrection assure us?

Answer One: That Jesus is God’s Son! The resurrection was the one absolute sign of the Savior that no pretender could ever do or imitate. God said his Son would die and come back to life. Jesus said he would die and come back to life. Many prophets said that the Messiah would die and come back to life. That is exactly what Jesus did and thus we know that Jesus is God’s Son, just as promised.

Answer two: Jesus is our Redeemer! When someone tells you that he is about the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, that He is the atoning sacrifice for sin and that it will all hinge on his dying and being raised from the dead and HE DOES THAT, then everything He said and taught is true. Our sins are forgiven and we have the gift of eternal life and salvation because of what Jesus has done. The resurrection is the ultimate proof.

Answer three: Jesus will raise us from the dead. Jesus promised that as He lives, so shall we. He is alive forever, living in the eternal kingdom of his Father. Remember, Jesus left that kingdom to come here and serve as our redeemer. His word and promises are true. God’s kingdom and eternity is a fact. And as sure as Jesus is still alive so you and I will have eternal life with him.

There it is. The purpose and reason for Jesus. Seriously, if it were just a matter of us doing our best and becoming better and better people, what was the point of Jesus? The point is our eternal life and salvation. The point is hearing about your Savior and his total awe. The point is letting that message of Jesus to the woman sink home. Yes, that message about fear.

Jesus said, **“Do not be afraid.”** Don’t be afraid of proclaiming His name and truth. Don’t be afraid of trusting in Him and his majesty on your behalf. Don’t be afraid of the things of this world and the people of this world, for they can never hurt, damage or destroy your soul. Don’t be afraid of trusting exactly what God’s Word declares because it has behind it the wonder and majesty of Jesus. Don’t be afraid to be a child of God. Don’t be afraid of the peace, joy and wonder that Jesus brings to us. Don’t be afraid of silly little diseases or other problems of the world, for Jesus has won the battle and all things are in his hand. Don’t be afraid when you don’t grasp and see, when you don’t get it, because Jesus does and He is all that counts. And seriously, don’t be afraid of death, because our physical death is nothing more than God’s way of calling us to His kingdom of eternal life. I can’t emphasize this enough, IN JESUS DON’T BE AFRAID!

So we couldn’t be together this Easter, it does not matter for Jesus lives. We missed out on our Easter breakfast…it doesn’t matter, for Jesus lives. I miss everyone at church, well, that does matter because that tells me you do grasp that Jesus lives. He is our Everything, so don’t be afraid! Amen.