

**Matthew 28:1-10**

1 After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. 2 And 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. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 4 For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. 5 But 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; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 7 Then 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.' This is my message for you." 8 So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of 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" (NRSV).

Easter Sunday is my favorite day of the year. It just means so much to me spiritually as we celebrate the resurrection of the Lord. The Scripture for today, taken from the Gospel of Matthew, tells us that these events took place at dawn on Sunday morning. Two Mary's go to the tomb. However, something they were not expecting happens. According to Matthew's testimony an earthquake occurred, an angel interacts with the women, and the guards that were guarding the tomb freak out and faint. Then the angel tells the women not to be afraid and announces that Jesus has been raised just like he said he would be. Then the angel instructs the women to go tell the others. The two Mary's leave with mixed emotions; they have fear and great joy. They run to tell the disciples but before they get to them they meet Jesus and we have a wonderful happy ending.

Now let's dig deeper into the text. This took place after the Sabbath because the Sabbath is a day of rest and they could not go to the tomb on the Sabbath. The Sabbath is from Friday evening at sunset to Saturday evening at sunset. Jesus was on the cross on Friday and was buried in a rush because the Sabbath was approaching and there was no time to prepare the body appropriately. They had to get the body off of the cross, transport the body to the tomb, then seal the tomb and they had to travel back home before the Sabbath arrived. On Sunday at sunrise it is the first time that it was both legal and safe for the women to go back to the tomb in order to anoint the body of Jesus.

According to Matthew, women were the first to receive the news and encounter the resurrected Jesus. They were there at the Cross. They were there when the body was placed in the tomb. They were there with Jesus when the disciples were deserters just like Jesus said they would be. It is the women that are now the first to receive love's reward and the first to know the joy of the resurrection. The angel reminds the women of what Jesus said and confronts them with the empty tomb. The women are urged to share the good news. Their first duty, as directed by Jesus, is to go proclaim the good news of the resurrection. This applies to us too, our first commandment when we discover Christ is to go and tell the good news.

Have you ever wondered what would have happened if Jesus was not raised from the dead? If Jesus had not been raised then everything would have finished in tragedy. The very existence of the church today is evidence of the resurrection. The church grew from a small group of disciples that were deserters and deniers. They were shocked, traumatized, and afraid

seeing the mob seize Jesus. However, they transformed into bold witnesses after they encountered the resurrected Jesus. The church also grew from a man named Saul that was a devout Jew in the process of persecuting the church until he encountered the resurrected Jesus. Then he became the Apostle Paul a great church planting missionary. The church itself is evidence of the resurrection. Otherwise, the disciples would have remained in hibernation and the Paul would have remained a devout Jew.

There is a very interesting, profound lesson right before today's Scripture. We see desperation on the part of the religious leaders. For one thing there is a conspiracy to trap him and they look for false evidence to put him to death. There is an illegal trial that takes place during a nighttime court with false witnesses and also during Passover. Then there is bribery to hide the truth. This is a gross miscarriage of justice, the kind of injustice that would make a popular TV show today. **Matthew 27:62-66** The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.' Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has been raised from the dead,' and the last deception would be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can." So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone (NRSV). There is beauty in the irony of this. Their belief is that Jesus is not the Messiah. So, they conclude that Jesus was deceiving them. To prove their point they seal the tomb. Now, this prevents any other option. There are three possibilities. One option is that the disciples could steal the body, but with the tomb sealed and guarded, no one can steal the body. Another option is that the authorities could obtain the body, but the opponents of Jesus don't have it and they would really want to get their hands on the body of Jesus in order to prove their case. The only other option left is resurrection, which is actually vindicated by eliminating the other options. When Sunday morning arrives it is discovered that the body of Jesus is missing from a sealed and guarded tomb. Now, the only option left for the authorities is a cover up. The beauty in the irony of all of this is that the opponents of Jesus - in their attempts to disprove his divine status, and through their plot, conspiracy, and deception - end up producing the evidence that verifies the divine status of Jesus.

The opponents of Jesus were never able to defeat him or disprove his divine status. One of my favorite lessons is found in Acts chapter 5 where the disciples are brought to the Sanhedrin. There is a Pharisee on the council that is a honored teacher by the name of Gamaliel who said "Consider carefully what you propose to do to these men some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him; but he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and disappeared. After him Judas the Galilean rose up at the time of the census and got people to follow him; he also perished, and all who followed him were scattered. So in the present case, I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone; because if this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them - in that case you may even be found fighting against God!"

Christ is the real deal. The conflict that Jesus encountered was from people that were actually fighting with God. Maundy Thursday we are sad and remember the despair. But come Sunday morning we are radiant with joy of the good news of the resurrection. The resurrection is a central fact of the faith. What God brings to the world is hope through the magic of God's love.