

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobnier, Illinois
Easter A
April 12, 2020
Matthew 28:1-10

An Unexpected Easter

Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. 2 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. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 4 And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. 5 But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you." 8 So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

9 And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and 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, and there they will see me." (Matthew 28:1-10 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

Alleluia! Christ is risen! [He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!]

No one expected this. No one thought that on Easter we would have a nearly empty church. No one thought that those who are here would be wearing face masks. No one thought that instead of a congregational breakfast and Easter egg hunt, we'd be stuck at home. No one expected to celebrate this special day watching church on TV. No, this was not expected.

Then again, everything that first Easter was unexpected. After all, the two Marys went to the tomb to find a dead Jesus. They had seen Him crucified. They'd watched Him die. They'd seen Him buried. They'd seen the sky grow dark. They'd felt the earthquake when He died.

But before they arrived at the tomb, there was another earthquake. An angel of the Lord had come down from heaven and rolled back the stone that had been placed in front of the tomb and sat on it. The glory of God shone through him and the soldiers guarding the tomb, or rather guarding Jesus' body, were scared almost to death. Certainly no one was expecting any of that!

When the women arrived at the tomb, the angel spoke to them, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay." Now *that* was certainly unexpected. To be sure, one doesn't see an angel of the Lord every day. In fact, when it does happen, the angel usually says, "Fear not," to

calm those fears. It's a terrible thing to see an angel of the Lord, to see the glory of God in its brightness and holiness. After all, sinners can't bear that sight because they know they deserve God's anger and punishment.

But more than "Do not be afraid," the angel told them he knew why they were there. They were in the right place. But this news that Jesus had risen was most unexpected. That just didn't happen. But notice that the angel also said, "as he said." Jesus had said at least three times that He would be killed and on the third day rise again. This was now the third day, so it should have been expected. But no one really knew what He meant when He said it. Still, all this is as Jesus had said. His Word is true. It is trustworthy. That's why we too are constantly directed to Jesus' words. Then, to support his statement that Jesus had risen from the dead, the angel invites them to "see the place where he lay." It's one thing to hear it; it's another to see for ourselves. That's why the stone was rolled away, after all. Not to let Jesus out, but to let people in to see that the tomb was empty, that He was not there.

Still, an empty tomb is just that. Empty. Jesus may not have been in there, but what does that mean? The angel provided the needed explanation – Jesus isn't there because Christ is risen! [He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!]

But there was more good news. The angel tells the women to go tell Jesus' disciples that Jesus "has risen from the dead." After all, they had abandoned Him and fled. They too had seen Him die, and, as we learn later, they were afraid the Jews would come after them next. And then there's the promise that they would see Him in Galilee. That too would be rather unexpected.

So the women left the tomb with fear and great joy. All they had to go on was believing what the angel said was true. Yet, they ran to the disciples to tell them the great news. But, it seems that before they could do that, Jesus met them. They had heard that He had risen, now they saw the proof. But I'm not sure He greeted them with a simple, "Hi, ladies." The word that He said was, "Rejoice!" Indeed, there was reason to rejoice. A mighty victory had been won. Their Lord who had been crucified, who had been dead and buried, is alive. More than that, He is with them in grace and mercy and love unbounded. Their joy knew no bounds. They fell to the ground, grabbed His feet, and worshiped Him. Their greatest delight was to be with Jesus and receive the forgiveness of sins, grace, and righteousness. (Ap. V.189).

And then Jesus tells them to not be afraid and to "go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me." He says the same thing the angel said. He removed their fear, filled them with joy, and sent them off with His Word. They were to tell the disciples what they had seen and heard. But this was no burden. No one has to tell a newly engaged bride to tell others the good news, rather, try to stop her. In the same way these women did as Jesus had said. How could anyone stop them? This was all so unexpected, but it happened. It changed their lives forever.

Even as it does ours. You see, Jesus' resurrection proved that everything that He'd taught was true. Jesus' resurrection proved that the Father in heaven accepted Jesus' suffering and death

in the place of every person who would ever live. So now we have hope for the most important thing that can ever come up in our lives – our eternal destiny – to dwell with God forever in heaven in perfect peace, joy, and bliss! This is all because Jesus is no longer dead, but alive.

And because He is risen from the dead, God sees you as one of His very own, forgiven through the blood of His Son who died and rose for you. Your sins are forgiven – every last one of them – through Jesus. And because Jesus is risen from the dead, you too will rise. For as St. Peter said, “everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name.” (Acts. 10:43). And where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

And while that may make us feel okay about our eternal future, what about now? As we live in this life, we live in a constant battle with Satan, the world, and our flesh. We live in constant warfare as we face temptation time and again. But when we look to the cross and the empty tomb, when we grab hold of Jesus by faith, we find the power to resist the temptations of this life and endure whatever afflictions come upon us. When we see the living Christ by faith, we claim the victory that He earned as our own. We have life because Jesus is alive.

Yes, this Easter is unexpected as was the first. But, O, what joy! Jesus, the Lamb who was slain, is risen from the dead. So while we worship Jesus who died, we don't worship a dead Jesus. We worship Jesus who has removed death's power over us and is risen from the dead so that we too shall rise to live with our God forever. We have Jesus' Word on it. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.