

## Matthew 28. Easter Sunday

Beloved friends, the long-awaited dawn has come. On Friday, we marked the death of Jesus Christ on a cross of our own making. We mourned the way sin and suffering often seem to have the upper hand in our world. We confessed how we are sometimes complicit in those broken things. But just as we say it is darkest before the dawn, the dawn always comes. And is now here.

Christ is risen, and we have a new beginning. Christ is risen, and the forces of destruction cannot reign forever. Christ is risen, and death no longer has power over us. It's right to pull out all the stops and celebrate. It is right to feast and celebrate with friends, and break out the chocolate and the Easter dresses, even if it's not feeling a whole lot like spring. But if you're feeling just a little bit of whiplash in the movement of Good Friday to Easter Sunday, you are not alone. Just look at the disciples.

My friends have been urging me for a while to watch the blockbuster television series, *The Chosen*. I resisted for a long time, because I've seen more melodramatic and kitschy adaptations of the life of Christ than anyone should have to, let alone a pastor. I've been assured that this version is reverent but not cheesy. So I think I'm finally ready; just don't tell me how it turns out.

In all sincerity, I changed my mind for two reasons. First, it really is my business to pay attention, not only to the messaging about Jesus that takes place within these four walls, but also to what the rest of the world is hearing about him. My neighbors, my senators, my congressfolk. It's good to know.

And then second, I do feel sympathy for the writers, directors, and actors who try to bring this sacred story to life. The scriptures describing the life of Christ are more like vignettes or short episodes than a biography. Wrestling that into a screenplay can't be easy. There's no choice but to fill in the gaps with *something*. And if you have been reading or hearing these accounts for decades you've undoubtedly made up your own mind about how Peter looks walking across the water, or the way Jesus delivers that one particular line. The risk of accidentally causing offense to viewers' "headcanon" is extremely high.

And of course the question about which gospel to follow when. Whose account of the resurrection we get to see. Because if you don't know this already, the gospel writers, like any four witnesses to an *unprecedented, cataclysmic* event like the resurrection, see things from four different viewpoints. Mark tells the whole story at breakneck pace, as though it were a thriller claiming "Just the facts, ma'am." John gives us the most poetic and poignant version, as Jesus comforts the grieving Mary Magdalene. Luke reminds us that women were the first evangelists, the first to proclaim Jesus raised from the tomb.

And Matthew, who provides our text for this morning, is the careful archivist connecting Jesus to all the patterns and prophecies that have come before. To the Hebrew Bible. To his forebears. To his childhood. There are no tears depicted in this version. The women aren't shown bringing spices to tenderly wash and embalm Jesus' body. On one level, it could be any Sunday morning, the first day of the week. But then comes the earthquake.

I have experienced an earthquake precisely twice in my life, and they were both very small ones. But there is no feeling more *un-earthly* than the glassware rattling in the cabinet and the ground moving under your feet. It is quite literally destabilizing. And this, we feel, is no very small earthquake in Matthew's gospel. The foundations of the earth are shaken. Nothing will be the same after the power of God has rolled the stone away from Jesus' tomb and revealed it to be empty. Jesus whose lifeless body was laid there Friday, and is now alive again in the world.

And then the angel sits down on the stone as if to say "this is permanent now." He sits down to speak to the women, this angel, whose appearance we can't even get our heads around. What can it mean to say this human-like form "looks like lightning"? What is so mighty that the military guard quakes and faints dead away?

I'm going to say we need this destabilization. This defiance of the laws of physics. This rerouting of every expectation. We need shaking up. And we need resurrection. Because if we dig into the message of Easter, it is Not. Just. "good will naturally overcome evil." You and I have too much experience of the world, too many examples to the contrary, to think that's true. We want more than platitudes, more than just "Cheer up, spring will

come soon.” We need to know, honestly, that we can’t save ourselves. But there is a power who can.

Because friends, I don’t know about you, but some days I have trouble tying my own shoelaces. If I’m in charge of digging myself out of the grave, I am sunk. If we are supposed to solve the world’s problems on our own, things look pretty desolate.

But today a new day has dawned. See, dawn is just the beginning of things, not time to roll the credits. Dawn is the moment when the light *begins* to pierce the night sky. What we see with our eyes may still be murky and bleak. But we can trust in the promise that if God can break the power of death one time, then death no longer has dominion over us, now or ever.

The angel with a face like lightning sits down and tells the two Marys, “Do not be afraid.” Maybe it doesn’t happen all at once. We’re told they leave the tomb with fear AND great joy. And that feels true, not only for their situation, but also for ours. I love the defiant note in the Anglican burial service that says “All we go down to the dust, yet even at the grave we make our song Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.” Hold on to that fierce alleluia, even if you don’t quite feel it yet.

Winter is loosening its grip. Despair gives way to courage. God, whose power is Love, is and will be victorious over the forces of death. The cross, symbol of violence and torture, has been remade as a sign of relentless life.

In the rousing Easter homily of John Chrysostom: “O Death, where is your sting? O Hell, where is your victory? Christ is risen, and you are overthrown. Christ is risen, and the demons are fallen. Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice. Christ is risen, and life reigns. Christ is risen, and not one dead remains in the grave.” Amen.