

Texts: Acts 10:34-43; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Colossians 3:1-4; Matthew 28:1-10

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia. Say it with me again...

Such a big crowd here this morning. It's good to see you. But I have a question for you to ponder for a minute. Why did you come to church today? What did you expect to find here? What are you doing here?

Maybe you are here in church this morning because you come to church here every Sunday. Maybe you are here because it's Easter day and that is when you come to church. Maybe you are here in church because you are visiting family or friends this weekend. Maybe you read our web page or Facebook page and saw the announcement that it's Easter and you thought you would check this church out.

Here is another reason you are here: You are here because you are looking for Jesus. You have heard a story that he has risen from the dead. A story that is beyond comprehension.

But let's not get too far ahead of ourselves.

Let's step back and imagine what the previous couple of days must have been like for Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. On Friday they watched as Jesus died a gruesome, agonizing death. They watched as Joseph of Arimathea took Jesus' body down from the cross and sealed it in his new tomb. They watched as Roman soldiers were posted to guard the tomb from any tampering.

The two Mary's and Peter and the rest of the disciples had probably had spent the Sabbath day grieving for their dead Rabbi, their teacher. He was dead and buried. Everything he had taught them, everything he had given them, was over. They were probably wondering what would happen now to their little band of followers. Their hope

was gone. Even though Jesus had told them that he would rise on the third day, they hadn't known what to make of his words. What he said was incomprehensible.

So just before sunrise, the two women sneak out to go visit the tomb. It would have been too dangerous for the men because they were known to be Jesus' followers. Two women wouldn't cause any trouble with the guards.

And just as they arrive, just as the sun breaks the horizon, it happens – an angel of the Lord descends and rolls away the stone. They can feel the earth shake. They can hear the stone rumble as it broke apart. For Matthew, the natural world itself is a witness to the power of God's life. They see a divine being that dazzles and crackles like lightning. This is no little Tinkerbell angel. This angel is big and fiery and powerful. The women must have clung to each other in sheer terror. The big, burly guards faint dead away.

And then the divine messenger, this angel with lightning eyes, speaks to them. Because that is what angels do. They bring messages from God. And this is the message:

“Fear not. You are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, he has been raised. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples...”

Fear not.

Come and see.

Go and tell.

As the Mary's run down the path in both fear and joy, they run headlong into the risen Jesus himself. They hear his greeting, they recognize his voice, the voice of their teacher, the man they loved and followed and provided for. They fall at his feet. What he says to them is almost exactly the same as the angel's words: *Fear not. Go, tell my brothers. They will see me.*

This is the message of Easter day. This is the message that God sends to each one of us, gathered as we are around an empty cross, around an empty tomb: You are looking for Jesus and you will find him, but not where you thought. Life has broken through the chains of death. Love is stronger than hate. Your life as you have known it has ended. God has acted at that boundary of life that we call death and done something entirely new. New life begins this very Easter day and this life will never be the same again. Your new life in Christ and with Christ begins here and now.

Fear not:

What are you afraid of? Afraid of the unknown? Afraid of death? or of the troubles of life? Afraid that God will ask something of you? Afraid of what will come tomorrow? We all want to be in charge of our own lives. When things get too overwhelming, you, too can lay your fears at Christ's feet and worship him.

Come and see:

Come and see the place where he lay. There is no body there, no bones or decay, no death. Come and see what Christ has done for you. Come close and feel his presence here among us. Once again, as we've been reminded all through the season of Lent – those who encountered Jesus did so by seeing what he did, and hearing what he said and feeling his touch on them. The risen Jesus is no disembodied spirit. He has broken the bonds of death and is fully, eternally living.

Where do you see the risen Jesus? Where are the tombs of doubt, the tombs of pain that have been opened? Wherever there is suffering, wherever there is joy, wherever there is work to be done – Christ is there. Come and know that he walks beside you with every step.

Go and tell:

Spread the good news. Jesus Christ is not simply someone we read about. How do you know he is risen? You see the empty cross. You hear his words of forgiveness. You touch and taste the bread and the wine, his body and blood.

And then you go and tell the news to someone else. This story, passed down by word of mouth for two thousand years, began with those two Mary's running to tell the disciples what they had seen and what they had heard. An empty tomb. A dazzling angel. Jesus, risen from the dead. And the story spread. One person at a time, telling others what happened. Christianity is always one generation away from dying out. The story must be told, over and over again.

As incomprehensible as it may seem, this is why you are here today. You are here today because you are looking for Jesus. He is not in the tomb any longer. Death has been overthrown by life. And because of that incomprehensible fact, everything changes. Your life changes. Your relationships change. Suddenly you have all the time in the world. You don't have to spend your life trying to earn God's salvation or forgiveness or mercy or love. It has been given to you. The life that Jesus offers you when you come looking for him, that life is eternal life.

This is the Easter message: Christ is risen and life will never be the same. This is the Easter message that lives on through us.

Fear not. Come and see. Go and tell:

Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia.