

**Homily**  
**McCarter Presbyterian Church**  
*Easter Sunday*  
April 12, 2020

**Old Testament Scripture**

Psalm 27:1, 5-6

**New Testament Scripture**

Matthew 27:45-50, 55-61; 28:1-10 NRSV

From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. 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. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 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." So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

**In the Midst of Grief**

When it comes to worship, our mainline denominations hold that it doesn't get any better than the main worship service on **Easter morning**. Regrettably, circumstances of a worldwide illness have placed most of the pomp, decoration, and ceremony aside today. And, we are thankful that we can **assemble in worship** in the outdoor arrangement in our parking lot on this very special day for Christians around the world.

Regardless of the setting or location, our purpose today is to **praise God** and give thanks, and really celebrate that we are saved through the **power of God**. We sum it up when we say: **He is risen!** And, the purpose is to proclaim the name of **Jesus** and to bow down to God and to give thanks for, and to live literally, like there is **no tomorrow**. Indeed, a new tomorrow is possible through this resurrection miracle that we celebrate today.

And, in the midst of the happy celebration, we forget that all of this was born out of **grief**. We see this in our scripture lesson which describes great fear and wonder at the discovery at the tomb. The messenger from God creates that the disciples must go to **Galilee**. If we read ahead in *Matthew 28*, we see that everyone arrived there where the **Risen Christ** greets them. But, then he puts them to work:

Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Matthew 28:10 NRSV

This last part of events that followed the resurrection differs significantly among the four Gospels. In fact, it is nearly impossible to make all four come together and agree. But, it is clear that Jesus continued to teach and instruct the disciples after his resurrection. This miracle of all miracles truly was a **new beginning**. And, there were more instructions.

Before they can catch their breath from the journey all the way back to Galilee from Jerusalem, Jesus tells them they must go on a mission.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

Matthew 28:19-20 NRSV

In the church, we call these two verses the **Great Commission**.

What it really means is that our job is never really done. Yes, **Christ will come again**. We'll hear more about that as we lead up to **Pentecost**. But, like the disciples, you and I have the task of continuing to live out the message that Christ brought to us. This has little to do with endings, like the ones that we associate with the return of Christ. Through Jesus, the **kingdom of God** has been partly revealed through the miracle of resurrection on Easter; and yet, the kingdom is not fully completed or fully revealed.

So, that means that the work is still before us. The celebrations on **Easter Sunday** are wonderful, perhaps even necessary. We find **great joy** in it, as we should. But, all the while the **Great Commission** stays out there, telling us, even **commanding** us, that we cannot stand still, or count our membership or our offering total or the grandeur of our buildings as some verification of our leadership and great good fortune. Instead, the empty tomb points us to this fact alone: **everything** has come **from God**. And, you and I are only a **small part** of the story.

These words of Jesus to his followers convey to us this **stark reality**: We cannot pat ourselves on the back for the marvelous, yet incomplete, work that we have done. Jesus is still calling you and me to **go to Galilee**. And, Galilee is not in far away Israel and Palestine. No, it is here in our beloved city. It is at **Triune Mercy Center** helping the **homeless**, at **United Ministries** educating and training adults and children. It is just up the road where children need affordable daycare and an **early education**, rushing down to children as young as age two!

“**Go to Galilee.**” That what **the message** to the followers of Jesus on that first Easter morning. they said that day. Things didn’t end at that empty tomb: It was, and remains, a beginning! That is the testament of **the power of God.**

one of the more amazing things about that message and the wonder of this day, is that all of it was born out of **grief.** The joy that we should experience through our **faith in God** through Jesus Christ has its origin in an **empty tomb:** a grave made empty through the **power** of Almighty God. These are amazing events. This should be why we get up and give thanks in the morning. And, it should be the purpose of our **gathering each Sunday,** reenacting that precious day in Jerusalem.

So, after these many weeks of the Lenten season, what is your view of **Easter?** Has joy and purpose **risen out of emptiness,** personal loss, even the tragedy of disease and illness? Is it possible, that like the disciples our faith could arise from the the **emptiness of the tomb** and the **abundant grace and power** that created it?

Because, the only way that this hangs together is through **faith** and the **power** of Almighty God. Again, from Frederick Buechner:

He rose. A few saw him briefly and talked to him. If it is true, there is nothing left to say. If it is not true, there is nothing left to say. For believers and unbelievers both, life has never been the same again. For some, neither has death.

Now, death is conquered. **God has defeated the grave.** As the apostle Paul wrote,

“Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

“Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?”

But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:54d-55, 57 NRSV

Paul’s words reflect the **passion** of the believers who made up the early church. They looked backwards on their **experience of their faith** which had grown over time with Jesus, which then exploded into amazement and wonder at the appearance of the Risen Christ: Jesus resurrected. Christ risen from the grave! How does any human being describe something like that? And, how do you and I **live out our lives,** with this knowledge and personal experience of God’s power demonstrated to us? You and I have the rest of our lives to find that answer.

How will you and I **serve the Lord** in this time of Easter morning?

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