

Sermon Text – Sunday, April 5, 2026 – Pastor Paula Kraus

**1st Reading: Jeremiah 31:1-6; 2nd Reading: Colossians 3:1-4
Scripture for Message: Matthew 28:1-10 “Risen”**

After the sabbath, the women went to look at the tomb. Professor of Theology N. T. Wright argues that in a context of exile and oppression, some first-century Jews pinned their messianic hopes on the resurrection of martyred freedom fighters. Resurrection in this context always meant embodiment.¹ Given this, I expect that these women went to the tomb expecting to see and quite possibly touch the resurrected body of Jesus. There is, in Matthew’s narrative, no mention of the women carrying spices or oils with the intent to prepare Jesus’ body. They did not bring anyone with them who might be strong enough to move the stone away so they could access the tomb. These are the clues that indicate what the women had on their hearts and in their minds as they approached the tomb that morning.

The fullness of these women’s senses was engaged that morning. They felt the earthquake that the angel used to cause the stone to roll away. I am sure that living in that part of the world it wasn’t the first earthquake they felt. Maybe though, coming so closely after the earthquake that occurred the moment Jesus died on the cross, they paid greater attention to feeling the earth move this time. Have you ever felt the movement of the earth during an earthquake? I remember sitting in my office on the sixth floor of the hospital and feeling what I thought was someone shaking my chair, but no one was there – it indeed was an earthquake. It’s a weird feeling to say the least.

However, not only did they feel the earthquake the angel caused, but they also witnessed the angel rolling away the stone blocking access to the tomb and they saw the angel sitting on the stone. Matthew describes this angel as appearing like lightning with clothes as white as snow. Certainly, the women noticed that the guards who stood at the tomb were so afraid of the angel they “became like dead men,” furthermore it was the guards who fainted in fear not the women. After feeling the earthquake and seeing the angel, they now heard the angel speaking to them words of comfort

¹ Allen, Wm. Loyd. “Matthew 28:1-10 – Connecting the Reading with the World.” *Connections Year A, Vol. 2 – Lent through Pentecost*. Eds. Green, Long, Powery, Rigby, and Sharp. WJK. 2019. Print. 206-208

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and good news. “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.”

The angel invites them to “Come and see” and then to “Go and tell” what they have witnessed, and heard, and felt. Engaging their senses made this a genuine experience for them and not something ethereal or ghostly. To make the experience of Jesus resurrection even more “real” as they were running away full of joy suddenly Jesus met them. Jesus spoke to them and they were able to “clasp his feet and worship him.” Proving yet again that this was not an otherworldly event or a hallucination but something real. Jesus comforts them and tells them to share the good news of what they saw, heard, and felt that early morning.

Face it folks, all these events were things that could not happen in the natural world and that fact matters to us today. It is absolutely an unusual occurrence for angels to appear and cause earthquakes or simply roll stones away from tombs. Ordinary people do not “rise” from the dead to a physical form as if they had never died. These things could not happen, yet they did. The women experienced these events through the reality of their senses. They felt, touched, saw, and heard what we in our current culture consider impossible or at least otherworldly.

All of this, the empty tomb, the angel, Jesus' physicality in coming to the women, they all matter. This is not some made up story. Jesus did return to his disciples embodied – so they could touch, hear, and see him. This provides irrefutable proof that although Jesus died, Jesus lives. Yes, that challenges the imaginations of those who only believe in things that science can explain in the natural world. These are super-natural events, but they are real events that engage the senses. So, we need to not only engage our senses but also our imaginations to grasp the significance of Matthew's narrative.

Jesus is the “Word made flesh” – he was man – human – and embodied, made of skin, bones, and blood. He was a sexual being as much as people don't want to hear that. As such, his death was real, his burial should have been final, but it wasn't. But maybe some in the church prefer not to think too hard on the fact that Jesus suffered miserably and did actually die, or that he was resurrected

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and became recognizable to his disciples. There are some who prefer to find a more logical science-based explanation for the events of that weekend.

Nevertheless, he was as dead as dead can be and his resurrection reclaimed his body from the tomb. That is a difference that some point out in the gospel accounts of Jesus resurrection. Matthew is the only one who tells us that the women immediately recognized Jesus and that Jesus allowed the women to touch his resurrected body. He came back, defeating death, defeating Satan's curse, and defeating the oppressive binding of the Roman Imperialist chains. Even though the Gospel accounts of Jesus' resurrection differ in how the writers report them – let there be no doubt this was a real event.

“He is not here; he has risen” how would those words ring in your ears on a sabbath morning after you witnessed what occurred the three days prior? How would it make you feel to have Jesus standing in front of you in the flesh after only a few days ago you saw him crucified and die? Imagine what these women might have been feeling. Would you be, as those women were, filled with joy or would you be struck dumb as if dead, like the soldiers guarding the tomb?

The Easter story is something that we have heard and read repeatedly for so long that we take the event for granted. For many people, Easter is just about dressing up, going to church, and hearing the same bible stories that have no impact or real significance to their lives in the twenty-first century. Sure, the stories are about Jesus who rose from the grave. Jesus, someone who lived over two-thousand years ago and did some good things in that ancient culture, but was betrayed, punished, crucified, and buried. The bible claims that Jesus rose from the tomb on that third day. Some women discovered an empty tomb and told Jesus' disciples about it – the story goes on from there.

Significantly, Easter means renewal and restoration, it means victory, so we rejoice and praise the risen Lord. These women went out in the early pre-dawn hours to “see” the tomb – I am sure in their hearts they were expecting to see the risen Christ. They came to gain insight and understanding which is part of seeing. They did get what they came for, and they were sent to tell the men. Jesus

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commissioned these women to be the first to “preach” the good news on that resurrection morning. That is a part of the Easter story that remains overlooked even to this day but makes a statement about the current state of the church.

So where is the lesson for the church today? What do we expect to see on Easter Sunday mornings? Furthermore, what does this story of the Risen Christ tell us about God? Knowing what this tells us about God is a topic of theology that bears further exploration. The church must look at the Easter event as God's comment on Good Friday, God answers Jesus' cry from the cross – God did not forsake him. God rewards Jesus' obedience to the cross. In addition, the church cannot look at the Easter event as some foregone conclusion because of Jesus' divinity, on the contrary Jesus was fully human and his death was gruesome and inhumane.

The correct translation of verse six from our scripture reading is not “he has risen” but “he has been raised” meaning this was God's act of salvation. God has defeated death. Only because Jesus was as dead as any mortal can be was the resurrection a meaningful statement about salvation history. All the elements of this story speak to the majesty and power of God. We stand in awe!

Easter invites us, as the angel invited the women, to look inside the empty tomb and see the wonder that God has worked among us. This Easter story is not about the women, it is not about the guards, it is not about us – it is about the earth-shaking power and love of God who raises the dead and makes a way when we thought there was no way.

Going back to the beginning of the Gospel story, when the angel came to Mary to announce she would carry a son and call his name Jesus, the angel declared “nothing is impossible with God.” In our Easter story the power of God has come full circle – from Jesus' birth to Jesus' death nothing is proven to defeat the power of God. These are words of hope for us today, words of hope for the church and for the world. The resurrection of Jesus offers hope for all the world's challenges and all the world's victims – victory is ours; Jesus survived the worst they could do to him and because he is in us and with us, so can we. May we be open enough to feel, hear, and see what God is doing in our world.