

First Presbyterian Church
Cheyenne, Wyoming
Easter Sunday April 24, 2011
Rev. Bob Garrard

Worship Theme: Have You Been Raised With Christ?

Psalms 118:1–2, 14–24, Colossians 3:1–4, Matthew 28:1–10

Can you imagine what was on the minds of Mary Magdalene and the "other Mary" as they walked to the tomb of their dear friend, Jesus? I doubt that it was the verse from our Call to Worship that declares, "This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." These two women were shocked and grief stricken witnesses to the chaotic crucifixion and then the quiet burial of Jesus on that recent Friday. Now, very early in the morning of the Sunday that immediately followed, they sought out Jesus' grave. This tomb would be a "monument to the sadness they felt in the soul, a confirmation of the cruel truth that the world finally beats mercy and righteousness to death." ([Matthew-Long](#))

Come let us journey with them to the tomb of their friend and leader. It was a Sunday morning walk that was about to be filled with surprises the likes of which no one has seen before or after. "Somewhere along the path to the cemetery these two women left one world and entered another. Without even knowing that they had crossed the border, they left the old world, where hope is in constant danger; might makes right; peace has little chance; the rich get richer; the weak all eventually suffer under some Pontius Pilate or another; people hatch murderous plots, and dead people stay dead." Then, without realizing it at first, they entered a new world—"a startling and breathtaking world of resurrection and new life. Jesus of Nazareth, who had been dead as a doornail on Friday afternoon, was not in his tomb that morning, and the world—theirs and ours has been turned upside down ever since." ([Matthew-Long](#))

"The call to worship on that first Easter was not a cheery "Good Morning!" but a shattering earthquake that rippled a seismic shock through history and signaled that the fault lines of human history had shifted dramatically" from death and despair "toward grace and hope. A blazingly brilliant angel descended from heaven to appear at the tomb, effortlessly rolling back the heavy stone and sitting on it. The angel, the earthquake, and the movement of the stone were" symbols of the apocalypse"—the revelation of God's final plan for the world. "The angel was really God's own presence in mediated form. The earthquake was a drum roll signaling a dramatic act of divine power. The act of sitting down on the stone was a display of divine strength and authority, as if to say," "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" I Corinthians 15: 54-55, ([Matthew-Long](#))

"There were soldiers present at the tomb, a pathetic corporal's guard with what must surely have been the 'unluckiest assignment in military history'—making sure that Jesus stayed in the grave." The rumor was that his disciples would steal his body and claim a resurrection. This assignment "turned out to be more responsibility than they could handle, and the display of angelic lightning bolts reduced these mighty troops to a quivering mass of fear. Matthew could not resist a small joke at their expense. They became, he reports, 'like dead men.' They were on cemetery detail, of

course, to guard a dead man who was supposed to stay that way, but when their charge turned out to have suddenly become very much alive, it was they who become candidates for the grave.” (Matthew-Long)

“The angel spoke directly to the women, ‘Do not be afraid.’” A small comfort that was. “The angel meant, naturally, not to be afraid of his astonishing and glowing presence—who wouldn't be fearful?—but he meant something deeper, too. Because of the resurrection, they genuinely and profoundly did not need to be afraid of anything—not of death and not of life. Even when they endured great distress and deep anxiety and are ‘poor in spirit,’ they did not need to be afraid. The resurrection demonstrated: That God kept his promises, including the promise of resurrection: That God's mercy would prevail, and ‘theirs is the kingdom of heaven.’” (Matthew-Long)

“They came to view the sealed grave of their dead friend, but the angel beckons them to see the empty tomb, to become eyewitnesses of the great truth that ‘the prison room of death is empty.’ Then he quickly sends them on their way with a mission and a message, ‘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.’ These two women were now the human link between THE great event of God and the community of faith. They were the first ones sent by God with the good news ‘He is risen!’ They were the first apostles of the risen Christ.” (Matthew-Long)

“They left the tomb with a mixture of fear and great joy, and, as such, they were the church in miniature—overcome with joy over the good news they have heard but also apprehensive as they moved with this news toward a skeptical and dangerous world.” I mean, who will believe this miracle of God? Yet, that is why we are here today is it not? We want to hear again the “unbelievable” good news the world calls preposterous: God raised Jesus from the dead, and so shall he raise us from the dead to spend eternity with him! This is our greatest hope!! (Matthew-Long)

Yes, “the wonderful news of Easter is that Jesus is alive, and the terrible news of Easter is also that Jesus is alive, because nothing is nailed down anymore. The old joke about nothing being sure but death and taxes was at least half right; you could at least count on death. The way the world used to be, if something troubling got in the way, like a call for racial justice or a worker for peace or an advocate for mercy, the world could just kill it and it would be done with.” Death was the ultimate weapon. “But Jesus is alive, and righteousness, mercy, and peace cannot be dismissed with a cross or a sword. In the light of this new reality, we have to decide where we stand and what we will do in this new and frightening resurrection world.” (Matthew-Long)

“Suddenly, as the women battled to quell the fear and struggle to allow the joy to keep them moving on their mission,” Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” “And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him.” Wouldn't this cause your heart to explode with joy! Actually, a better way to translate what Jesus said was “Rejoice.” There isn't language available to describe what these two women must have felt to the core of their beings and Matthew did not even try. The man that they saw die a horrible death, and whose body was sealed up in a tomb two days before is, by the power of God alone, alive before them. They can see, hear and hold him again. Again, they took hold of his feet and worshiped him. They could not help but rejoice! Now the

verse from our Call to Worship that declares, "This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it" could well have filled their minds.

Next, Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." Now the women are fully energized on their mission to go tell the other disciples that the Lord is Risen!! They did indeed tell the disciples, who told others. And, centuries later, here we are sharing the same almost inexpressible joy of how God raised up Jesus Christ to overcome the mightiest human empire up to that time in history, and to defeat the seemingly insurmountable power of death.

This story of God's mighty power shown in the resurrection of Jesus has to be more than treasured verses from the Bible. It must be the heart of our faith journey. In effect Matthew is telling us as Christians, "Easter will not dawn for you unless and until you feel the earth tremble, hear the angel and obey his command;" to go meet the risen Lord, fall down, take hold of his feet, and worship him. Then race on to tell others of this fantastic Good News!

We cannot literally take hold of Jesus' feet in this world, but can do so by placing our faith in him. Paul's words in Colossians guide us in how to do this. For us to take hold of the feet of the risen Lord and worship him means that we surrender our lives to him. It means, like him, we die to this world's power and hold upon our lives. It means we no longer allow "death and taxes" to control our lives. Our baptism, like this morning's baptism of Cadence Marie Cooper means we have died to sin and been raised by God with Jesus to a new life. As Paul wrote: "So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory." As in our baptism, Paul declared that to be raised with Christ means we belong to him; every single cell, thought and action of our body and being belong to him, the victorious risen Lord.

To be raised with Christ also means we begin to live new lives, especially today, the "Day of Resurrection" of all days. Paul describes what this raised with Christ life looks like in Colossians 3: 12-17. "As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved," raised with Christ we are to "clothe (ourselves) with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience." We are to "Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

So, have you been raised with Christ? Have you begun the faith journey where "you feel the earth tremble, hear the angel and obey his command," to go meet the risen Lord? Like the two Mary's, have you fallen down, taken hold of his feet, and worshiped him? I pray to God that you have so that all of us may join the Psalmist on this day of

resurrection in proclaiming, “This is the LORD’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it!” Psalm 118:23-24

(Many thanks to Dr. Thomas Long and his book, Matthew, pgs. 322-324 and to Dr. Paul Minear and his article in “Interpretation,” January 1984, pgs. 60-63 for many quotes and ideas in this sermon.)