

# Jesus is Risen

## Matthew 28:1–10 (NRSV)

After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. **2** 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. **3** His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. **4** For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. **5** But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. **6** He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. **7** 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.” **8** So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. **9** Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. **10** Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

**The Pivotal Event.** Have you ever witnessed a truly pivotal event that changed everything for you?

When Patty and I married, I was still a student at Emory and Henry College and she taught elementary school in Marion, VA. Two years later we left Virginia and moved to Apison where I was the pastor and Patty was teaching in Whitfield County, GA. I was enrolled in seminary in Atlanta at Emory University. Nearly a year after we had moved and I was finishing my second semester, Patty shared **she thought she was pregnant. It turned out to be a reality and that event changed our lives.**

When the OB/Gyn confirmed Patty's suspicion, I immediately began to rethink my seminary plan. I knew I wanted to be living full-time at Apison when the baby was born so I enrolled in summer school and took off the winter semester because the baby was due in February. Not long after the baby was born, Patty felt the tug and calling in her heart to be "stay-at-home" mother and gave up her teaching position. Our lives pivoted on that news of pregnancy and birth and have been impacted us ever since.

That little boy is now a man, husband and father, who we love have loved from day one. Like the moon's influence on the earth, his gravitational pull has impacted us. As a matter of fact as I was starting to write this sermon, he called me and we talked about stuff for some 20 minutes. (So if this is not such a good sermon, blame it on him.)

**Events can have a huge impact on us.** Some events impact a large portion of the world and history itself. Some may come from negative events such as 9-11 while others have a very positive source such as the launch of Facebook or Volkswagen coming to Chattanooga.

The two women Matthew wrote about who came to see Jesus' tomb were part of a two-part pivotal event which had a huge impact on their lives and changed the world.

**Mary Magdalene was a broken and troubled woman.** She had an encounter with Jesus that transformed her life and set her free. The other **Mary who went to the tomb was likely the mother of James and John**, 2 of the 12 disciples. She had been a witness to Jesus' profound impact on her sons. Both women had been followers of Jesus and loved the Lord deeply.

Just three days prior to this trip to the tomb, their world had been turned upside down. **They were witnesses to Jesus dying on a cross.** They had watched as the life drained from their beloved friend's body. The loss they felt must have been overwhelming. The One in whom they had placed their hope of transforming their world died. (Have you ever had a hope and dream to die?) Their world was changed. I imagine they felt so lost. The grief was numbing and overwhelming. Deep within they knew their lives would never again be the same.

So on the first day on which they had an opportunity they headed to the burial site of Jesus. (Perhaps you know what that feels like because you have returned a few days to the place where a loved one was buried.) I imagine they were going there to honor Jesus as well as to mourn. The mourning was their new normal because they had been doing a lot of it since the crucifixion.

But when they arrived at the tomb, their whole lives were shaken when they saw the huge rock sealing it had been rolled away. They were startled when a shining figure spoke to them and told them Jesus was not there but he had been raised from the dead.

Now that is not the news that any human expects to hear when she goes to the cemetery to dress the grave of one she loves. We expect the dead to be dead. We expect their bodies to be in their place.

With this announcement their lives where once again changed. This would impact them for as long as they would live. They knew it would impact all those who had been mourning Jesus' death. But they could not go back to the place where they had been before Jesus death. Some new reality had dawned.

**One of my favorite places to eat is PF Chang's.** I think they have the best Asia food in the region. If you have been there, you know that the **main entry is a revolving door.** When you

step inside the door way, you have entered another realm. You are neither inside the restaurant nor outside. But when you push the door, you soon have an opening into the world of the restaurant. At the crucifixion, these women stepped into this netherworld of a revolving door into a different dimension. But when they went to the tomb, the revolving door opened into a whole new world.

While they did not perceive it at the time, the events of crucifixion and resurrection not only changed their lives and those who had followed Jesus, but it would have an impact on the whole world and human history. Things have not been the same since Jesus was raised from the dead. Our very presence here today is evidence of that change.

The resurrection served as God's announcement of triumph over death and sin. Through the risen Jesus, we can have new life and a deep and meaningful relationship with the Living God. Through Jesus, our slumbering souls can truly come alive.

### **Galilee.**

As Mary and Mary were processing the news they had heard, the angel told them to go tell the disciples to go to Galilee where they would meet Jesus. There is a part of Matthew's resurrection story I find intriguing. To me as a reader this seems unexpected.

Why wouldn't Jesus tell the women to go and to bring them back to the tomb? There they could see him and the evidence of the resurrection. After all the place had become a holy place because it marked the location of resurrection. Why not set up a holy shrine there to celebrate this divine event where God's power of conquering death was put on display? Wouldn't thousands of pilgrims flock there? (Of course, some three hundred years later a church would be built there, or at least where they thought the tomb had been.) But that was not Jesus' original idea.

Why go to Galilee? It was not at the heart of that day's religious center. Galilee was a common place removed from the centers of power and religion. So why Galilee?

Galilee was the area where Jesus had lived and most of his disciples had lived. It was where the vast majority of their ministry had been focused. It was the place of the regular, ordinary life.

That is the place where we are most likely to encounter Jesus. It can be meaningful to go to special places on retreat, to special events with well-known Christian leaders, try new churches. We may have special encounters there. But the place where we are most likely to meet Jesus and be transformed is in the midst of our everyday life. He is among us when we live daily. Jesus is in our routines. He is here as we gather for worship. He is present when we walk on the campus of our schools. He is present as go to our places of work. If we can but open our lives, we too will experience the Risen Christ.

In 1993, Jerry Sittser, a man of strong faith in Christ, experienced an unthinkable tragedy – his family was in a serious automobile accident that killed his wife, a daughter and his mother leaving him as a single parent of three children. In his book, *A Grace Disguised*, he tells not only the story but helps his readers understand loss and how God is present. He shares how that in normal activities of his life – caring for his children, cooking meals, teaching in the university that healing came in his life. It was there he encountered Jesus who brought healing.

### **Pivotal Relationship.**

So the women started on their journey to the place where the disciples were holding out.

As they were on their way, the pivotal event they had just heard about and with the empty tomb had become witnesses of took a deeper step for them personally. As they were rushing toward the disciples' hiding place, Jesus met them.

In an instant, their experience shifted from a pivotal event (Jesus being raised) to a pivotal relationship. Jesus met them while they were on their way. The experience went to a whole new level for them. At that moment they beheld the person of Jesus Christ.

When you read through the biblical narratives of the resurrection, you find such a strong theme of Jesus meeting his followers where they were – two people traveling to Emmaus, the Disciples in an upper room, Thomas who wanted to see the evidence of crucifixion, the disciples fishing on the Galilean lake. For these, the resurrection went from this amazing and transformative event to a deepened relationship with Jesus.

These encounters with Jesus brought healing in the hearts of some broken people. These encounters gave them new hope.

In real and amazing ways, Jesus comes and meets you and me where we are. Jesus wants to be more than a historical and religious figure we know about. Jesus wants us to have more than a belief that he lived, did and taught good things, died and rose again. Jesus wants us to have real and vibrant relationships with him.

This is why he comes to us in significant ways. Jesus meets us where we are. Often the ways are subtle but none-the-less real. How has Jesus met you in your life?

### **Responding to the Risen Savior.**

The beauty of grace is Jesus comes to us where we are. Jesus meets us in the midst of our journey.

While they women were on their way, Jesus met them. As I said earlier, Jesus desires to have a deep and personal relationship with us. So he takes the first step.

Many of you know about the first step. If you are married or have a significant other in your life, the relationship started when one of you made a brave and significant step to engage in the relationship. Perhaps you asked the other person out to dinner or expressed in some way your interest in her or him. For there to be a relationship, someone must take a first step. Jesus takes the first step.

For the relationship to be forged and to grow, there must be a response. If you desire a relationship with another and you make the first move and the other person does not respond, there is little hope for a relationship.

For these women, Jesus met them along their way. Do you remember how they responded? They fell at his feet and worshiped him. This is vivid response isn't it? It is one of humbling oneself at Jesus' feet. It is an act of honoring their Lord.

When Jesus meets us along our journey - whether it is our first encounter with him, an encounter when we have been on the slide spiritually or are in the midst of great growth, that encounter can only be transformative when we respond to him. We must humble ourselves before him. Then we grasp hold and adore him.

How will you respond to the Jesus you have encountered this morning. Will you respond to him so this day will move to a pivotal relationship?