



LIVING WORD EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Evangelical • Reformed • Catholic

Come and See. God and Tell.

Do not be Afraid.

St. Matthew 28

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March 31, 2018 – Easter Vigil

We read our Gospel tonight and it's clear: God is doing something new. If we believe Matthew's tale of the empty tomb it means that the world will never be the same. It demands we change. The empty tomb declares that Jesus really is God's King and if that's true, then he deserves our allegiance—and not just part of it. He demands all of it. We got a taste of that on Thursday when Jesus told us to love each other *as he has loved us*—to love each other in a way that makes us vulnerable. At first loving each other may sound warm and fuzzy and easy and simple, but when we let those words sink in—love each other *as I have loved you*—we hear the challenge. This is love that led Jesus to the Cross. We need to hear those words spoken by the angel, “Do not be afraid!”

On that first Easter morning the women certainly had good reason to be afraid. There was an earthquake. There was an angel who looked like lightning. There were Roman soldiers—big tough guys—struck down like they were dead. At first glance these are all things it makes sense to be afraid of, but if we stand back for a minute and consider what's just happened—an earthquake and an angel and incapacitated Roman soldiers—it all starts to make perfect sense. In fact, the angel's command not to be afraid starts to make sense too. Jesus went to the cross bearing the weight of everything that is wrong with the world. He went to the cross bearing the weight of evil that has corrupted human life and he went to the cross bearing the weight of evil that has corrupted nature. He went to the cross bearing their weight and he rose on Sunday having defeated them and so this scene that greeted the women is, oddly enough, just what we might expect. (Well...with plenty of

hindsight, at any rate.) Jesus has brought together heaven and earth. He's brought together God's realm and our realm. The earth quakes with the reality that Jesus has set in motion the forces that will make it new. The angel comes, heaven's representative, and as he comes, Caesar's thugs, the representatives of his violent and rebellious empire are struck down. There's no place in God's new world for pretend lords, for those who claim God's sovereignty for themselves, no room for Caesar or for Herod or for their henchmen. In Jesus, heaven and earth have come together. The new creation has begun and the wicked and rebellious powers of the old world have been struck down. There's no place for them anymore. God's life and his new world are breaking in. Jesus, the King, is making all things new and he sends out the royal summons to be part of it. That new commandment he gave us on Thursday, to love others as he has loved us, it's at the centre of this new world. But to preach it, let alone to do it—that's scary stuff. It flies in the face of everything the old world stands for. It challenges everything. It will turn the world upside-down—or really, right-side up! And it's suddenly possible in Jesus' new world. Don't be afraid. Stop for a minute and consider what it means that this crucified Jesus is now alive. Look at what's happened to the powers that dominated the old world—they're lying powerless on the ground.

And once we've set aside our fear, the angel gives us two more commands.

First the angel beckons us to come and see. People don't rise from the dead. But when we see the empty tomb for ourselves as the women did, when we see the representatives of human empire powerless on the ground it starts to dawn on us that Jesus really is Lord and that his kingdom really is breaking into this world. Everything's changed. For some people that's thrilling. For some people—especially when we've invested ourselves in the old world—it's scary. Some people are just incredulous. Like Thomas, they have to stick their fingers in the holes in Jesus' hands before they'll believe. And to all of us the angel says, “Come and see”. Bring your question and your doubts. Come and

look at the evidence. That's why we have these four Gospels written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—so that we can come and see both the life and the death of Jesus. So that we can come and see for ourselves the evidence of the empty tomb. Even the way they tell the story is evidence that they didn't make it up. Come and see that God has broken the power of sin and death. Come and see how God has been faithful to his promises, how despite people trying to stop him at every turn and despite human failures, God has done what he said he would do.

When the angel invites us to come and see, they invite us to step over the bodies of those soldiers lying on the ground unconscious. The soldiers represent not just the pretender kings of the world and their rebellious empires. They represent everything that was wrong with the world that Jesus came to set right. But we're used to being afraid of them. We're used to them directing our lives and telling us what to do—and if we disobey there'll be consequences to pay. They're the doubt and the depression and the discouragement. They're that voice that laughs at us and tries to hold us back when we think about the possibility of living a life transformed, living as if we're dead to sin and alive to God as St. Paul says in our Epistle.

It's easy to forget the angel's first command: Do not be afraid. And when we forget that we see the soldiers and even though Jesus has knocked them flat, we're afraid to get any closer; we're afraid to step over them to go and see the empty tomb for ourselves. What if the soldiers wake up? We're afraid to come and see the empty tomb, to see the facts that proclaim that sin and death have been defeated and that we can ignore the soldiers, that they have no power over us in Jesus' new world. Brothers and Sisters, whatever form the soldiers take for you, remember what Paul tells us this evening: Once you've passed through the waters of Baptism you have died to sin and are alive to King Jesus. Once you've passed through the waters of Baptism and entered Jesus' kingdom you have been set free from sin. Sin has no power over you unless you let it. Paul writes,

“Consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in King Jesus.” Consider yourselves. The Greek word he uses has the sense of working something out to its logical conclusion. Come and see. Look around. See the empty tomb, see the angel, see the soldiers struck down and do the math. And if you do the math, if you work through the problem, if you evaluate the scene that greeted the women that Easter morning, everything works out to say that if you are in Jesus, then you are dead to sin and alive to God. Don’t be afraid anymore. Swim in your baptism.

But life in King Jesus doesn’t stop at “come and see”. The angel also sent the women out, commanding them to “go and tell”. Think about the bigger story. In the very beginning, God didn’t just create Adam and Eve to come and see—to be in his presence and to know his goodness. No, he drew them into and made them part of his creative purposes. There was no one else for them to go and tell, but God did tell them to be fruitful and to multiply—to raise up new generation after new generation to live in and to know God’s goodness and to enlarge the garden. Imagine if they hadn’t disobeyed and been cast out. If they’d been faithful, as the human race grew and grew, as they cared for the garden it would have grown with them until one day it filled the whole earth. Of course, it didn’t happen that way. They rebelled and were cast out. Heaven and earth, God and humanity were separated. But even that won’t stop God. As we’ve heard all week: God is faithful. What he starts he finishes. And so, in Jesus heaven and earth have been brought back together and now, in Jesus’ new creation God sets our mission back on track. Jesus has accomplished the redemption of his Creation and he gives to us the task he gave to Adam. Go and tell. Proclaim the good news that Jesus has died, that he has risen, that his kingdom has come and that he is Lord. Go and tell so that others can come and see so that they can go and tell. God’s new creation happens and it grows through his people. On Easter we greet each other with the good news: Christ is risen! And we respond to each other: He is risen indeed,

Alleluia! But don’t just greet each other that way. We need to *go out* and greet the world with those words, proclaiming that Christ is risen. That’s how God’s new creation happens. That’s how it grows.

But it’s not always that easy for us. Just as it’s not always easy to step over the stricken soldiers to come and see, it’s not always easy to go and tell. We make excuses. God’s gifted some people for that task, but not me. God’s called professionals to go and tell, but I’m not a professional. People won’t believe me. People will think I’m stupid or foolish for believing this story. But our Gospel tonight shuts down all our fears and excuses. The first people the angels told to go and tell weren’t men like Peter and John. The men were hiding. They were still afraid of the soldiers. No, the first ones sent to go and tell were the women. And consider that in their culture the witness of a woman was nearly worthless. No sensible person would believe them. But the angels sent them anyway. They were the first whom God chose to come and see the evidence of the empty tomb, the angel, and the soldiers. They were the first ones sent to go and tell. But all of this should only drive home the point that while we’re the ones who spread the good news, it’s the good news that does the actual work. As Paul wrote to the Romans: This good news, this message about Jesus who died and rose and is Lord of all, this message *is itself* the power of God for salvation. Our job is to tell. God and his message of good news will do the rest.

Brothers and Sisters, Easter is a reminder to come and see that Jesus has risen and it’s a reminder to go and tell. This is why the first Easter command is: Do not be afraid. Jesus has risen from the grave. God’s kingdom, his new creation has come. And you and I are called to be a part of it. You and I are part of this new world in which heaven and earth, God and humanity have come back together. Last Sunday we read about Jesus declaring that the old temple’s days were over. He was going to make a new one. The temple was the place where heaven and earth

overlapped. It was the place where men and women went to meet God. It’s gone. But in its place Jesus has created a new temple, in us, in his Church. He’s placed his Spirit in us—God and human beings, heaven and earth back together again. He’s made us new and that means that he’s made us—he’s made you and me—witnesses of his kingdom, witness of his new creation. Dear Friends, hear the Easter Gospel. Do not be afraid. Come and see. Go and tell.

Let us pray: Glorious Lord of Life, we praise you, that by the mighty resurrection of your Son, you have delivered us from sin and death and made your whole creation new; grant that we who celebrate with joy Christ’s rising from the dead, may be raised from the death of sin to the life of righteousness; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and for ever. Amen.