**Matthew 28:1-10** April 16, 2017

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Easter Sunday

*Matthew 28:1 After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. 2There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. 4The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. 5The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. 6He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. 7Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.”*

*8So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9Suddenly Jesus met them.“Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. 10Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”*

Dear Friends of Jesus, Dear Friends In Jesus,

How joyfully the Christian wakes on Easter morning. It is always sunny on Easter for the Christian, even on a cloudy day like this, because our Savior has risen. His suffering and pain on Good Friday were real, but they were temporary. Some might consider winter a necessary evil that makes spring all the sweeter. So, too, Good Friday was a sad but necessary day that makes Easter all the more joyful.

Jesus is risen. And never again—do you understand that?—never again shall a payment be made for sin. It is over. The debt is paid. Now Jesus lives forever, and Easter declares that. That’s why, to the Christian, even cloudy Easters are sunny.

How differently the first Easter dawned. The first Easter was despair. Women going to the tomb to complete the burial of Jesus’ body. The disciples locked in a room hiding, hoping, praying that the murder of Jesus would not lead to more. Especially the disciples had an added burden. They felt the guilt of having abandoned Jesus to his enemies. Even if it was sunny, for them, the first Easter dawned cloudy.

But in God’s mercy he did not leave them that way. Even though Jesus’ disciples had forsaken Jesus, and even though the women ignored Jesus’ clear words that he would rise from the dead, he still was patient with them. Sometimes, if people don’t listen to me the second or third time, I kind of give up on them. “Never mind. I’m not going to waste my breath telling you again.” But not God. God is persistent. So on that Easter morning, Jesus not only rose from the dead, but God sent messengers to tell his children what would happen. But since they probably would not have understood on their own, God sent an angel.

Do you like to be the first person to tell people amazing, good news? I know I do. What parent doesn’t love to tell the grandparents about the things the grandkids do? Who doesn’t love telling a fellow fan who shut off the TV at half-time, who doesn’t love telling their fellow fan about the amazing comeback. We love to be the first to tell people good things.

Well, if you like to be the first to tell people good things, you can imagine the night before Easter in heaven. God is up in heaven and tells a huge crowd of angels, “Ok, Jesus is going to rise from the dead in a couple hours. I need a volunteer to carry a message. You need to tell those dear women about Jesus rising from the dead. You see, Jesus told them he would rise, but they just don’t seem to get it. So I need one of you to spell it out for them. Can I have a volunteer?” You should have seen the commotion! God could have sent a quarter million angels. (Ok. That’s not in the Bible, but you can imagine it, can’t you—because you love to be the first to tell people good things.)

And you get the impression from the Gospel of Matthew that this angel was kind of enjoying himself. He rolled back the stone, and then he sat himself on top of it. He just sat there, waiting for the women, triumphant. He was living the victory message even before he spoke. Even before he opened his mouth, those women would see that death had been conquered.

When the women came round the bend he greeted them and told them, ***“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. Come and see the place where he lay.”***

Well, the women couldn’t help but run, ***“afraid yet filled with joy.”*** Which almost doesn’t make sense, does it: ***“afraid yet filled with joy.”*** Where our family used to live, we didn’t have roller coasters. So some of our kids were kind of old before they got to their first roller coaster. I won’t tell you which one, but I remember going on a roller coaster with one of them for the first time—not a huge coaster, but big enough. First you sit there locked in the car while the others are getting in. And this kid who has never been on a roller coaster is getting a little worried. The kid wants out. “No. We are doing this.” Finally we start, slowly up the hill, hanging there on the top of that first big hill, waiting for the plunge. Around corner after corner. More hills and plunges. More corners. Finally we stop. “Dad, that was the worst thing I’ve ever done. Let’s do it again!” And that’s sort of what those women felt, ***“afraid yet filled with joy.”*** The roller coaster of emotion: Jesus is dead, no he’s alive. A lightning like angel, but he told us the most wonderful news. Do you believe it? I’m not sure I do. Let’s go and tell the Twelve!

A flood of emotions completely redefines their lives. And the angel on the rock disappears, never again to be seen, because now the work of angels belongs to the women. These women are God’s angels, God’s messengers, sent to take the good news to others.

But one more time, their journey is interrupted. Now Jesus stands in the path, and their joy becomes so great that they collapse (Verse 9). Before, the angel had said it, now they actually see Jesus standing before them. They fall to the ground, clasping Jesus’ feet and worshipping him. They thought that Jesus was the Messiah, but they find out that he is THE MESSIAH! He is more than they had realized. “Jesus is alive!” There is life beyond the grave.

This encounter between the women and Jesus kind of answers a question I have heard a few people ask over the years. People always have questions about what eternal life will be like. I do too! But this reading speaks to this question, “Will we know other people in heaven?” First of all, the Bible tells us that as Jesus rose from the dead, so we shall rise. So a parallel between the Jesus that the women and disciples saw, and the way that we shall live for eternity. And if you have ever asked, “Will we know other people in heaven?”, pay attention to the reading. What happened when Jesus stood before the women in our reading? They saw him, yes. He had a flesh-and-blood. But they also knew him.

Anyway, if life in this world is all there is, people would be right to grasp onto every single second of life that they can, every single breath. They would be right to live for the enjoyment of this moment. It would be good to accumulate and use as much money and toys and stocks and bonds and properties as you can. Because if there is no more than this life, you may as well enjoy what you can before it’s Game Over.

But the message of Easter is that this life is only the beginning. Our entire life in this world is only a few ticks of the second hand. The first day of eternity will last forever.

Since Jesus is the doorway to that eternal life, and since Jesus has declared that he is *the only* doorway to eternal life, we trumpet this news. We share it with others. We have heard the good news of Jesus and we want to tell others the good news. We want them to share with us the joy and blessings of Easter.

In the book of Acts, which records some of what the disciples did after Jesus left, you can find several sermons of the disciples. Every single time, their first sermon to people who have not yet heard the news is about Jesus rising from the dead. They always preached the resurrection as the core of the Christian faith.

To this day, it is the core of the Christian faith. Sure, we are concerned about how we live in this world, but our eyes are *set* on eternity. This is the message that gives us hope, that empowers us to live through the heartache and hurt of this world. Easter carries us through the grief of a loved one passing away. This resurrection also helps us to enjoy the blessings we have now because we have a secure future. This is why Easter is such a special day.

There is one other important point which I want to bring out from our reading. Easter is primarily about eternal life, but it is also about healing. The angel told the women, ***“Tell his disciples, ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.”*** And then Jesus appeared and told the women, ***“Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”*** These women were specially favored as the first hear the news, and the first see Jesus. They also carry the special message of reconciliation. The disciples who had all sworn allegiance to Jesus had, with the exception of John, deserted Jesus in his time of need. They had much to be ashamed of. But Jesus calls them, ***“Brothers.”*** Jesus assures them of forgiveness, and his continued friendship with them.

If Jesus could say this to them on Easter, only two days after their betrayal on Good Friday, then be assured that Jesus will always receive any wandering Christian. The message of Easter is for all people.

Good Friday reminds us that Jesus saved us from our sins. Easter is even better because it reminds us that Jesus saved us *for* eternal life in heaven.

That is the great news that we have to share with the world. Life eternal is God’s free gift to all through faith in Jesus, and God really means it when he says “it is for all”. We just need messengers to tell them. Amen.