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Matthew 28:1-10
April 09, 2023

The Surprise

Alleluia! Christ is risen! (Christ is risen indeed)

Good morning church; welcome to Resurrection Sunday. This is a joyous day when we celebrate an empty tomb. Christ is alive and among us. Nevertheless, I sometimes wonder, what does the resurrection mean for us today?

Please pray with me. Lord, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing to you? Our crucified and raised messiah. Amen.

How do we make sense of resurrection?

Resurrection is unlike one of Jesus's parables, using stories of everyday experiences, planting seeds, going to work, and reuniting with a son who asked for his inheritance early. Maybe Jesus had some unexpected twists, but nevertheless, a parable uses the building blocks of our lived realities to reveal profound truths.

However, the resurrection is extraordinary, which can be a stumbling block in our world.

The resurrection is an unexpected turn, a joyful result of a horrible process. If we simplify the resurrection to this, I have seen many things approximating resurrections. I can think about people in this church going into full remission from cancer, both recently and in our past. At the same time, yesterday, I attended a Holy Saturday service where the pastor said resurrection is not guaranteed. On Friday or Saturday, no one alive knew what would happen. Jesus told the disciples about him being raised, but the resurrection was a surprise.

Today, I am thinking about others whose future is uncertain, waiting for diagnoses, health insurance, housing, jobs, or what have you. Others are in it for the long haul, holding pesticide companies responsible for ailing our bodies and minds. For only taking up one day of Holy Week, it feels like we spend far too much time on Holy Saturday, and Resurrection Sunday seems light-years away.

In Matthew's account of the resurrection, Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Jesus, are heading to the tomb when an earthquake and lightning announce an angel descending from heaven. Like the heavens parting and a dove descending saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with Him, I am well pleased." So the resurrection is a natural blessing like rain falling during a drought.

Then the guards are struck down, like background characters freezing during a tense dialogue. Like the jailer who held Paul and Silas, an earthquake opened all the doors of his prison. When God intervenes, there is freedom for the captives, both living and resurrected. Given our denomination's webinar on looking beyond incarceration this year, it makes me wonder if the resurrection is a call to open up tombs for the purpose of reconciliation instead of punishment.

The angel speaks to the Marys, telling them not to be afraid and saying that Jesus has been raised from the dead. They respond with both fear and great joy. Fear in the face of a wild God that plays by no rules. Fear of the awesome power of nature to bring and take life. But joy because a disaster turned into a blessing. I know we have gone through and will go through times of fear and great joy.

How do we make sense of resurrection?

The resurrection is the unexpected, the hope amid hopelessness, the eternal reason to give hope a chance. It is the reason to keep struggling without giving up, no matter how much the odds are stacked against us. Resurrection is not guaranteed, and we may spend several lifetimes working for a brighter dawn. Amen.