

4.9.23 – Easter Sunday

“Fear or Joy, the First Evangelists”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Acts 10:34-43 (NLT)

The Gentiles Hear the Good News

³⁴ Then Peter replied, “I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism. ³⁵ In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right. ³⁶ This is the message of Good News for the people of Israel—that there is peace with God through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. ³⁷ You know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee, after John began preaching his message of baptism. ³⁸ And you know that God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Then Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

³⁹ “And we apostles are witnesses of all he did throughout Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a cross, ⁴⁰ but God raised him to life on the third day. Then God allowed him to appear, ⁴¹ not to the general public, but to us whom God had chosen in advance to be his witnesses. We were those who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴² And he ordered us to preach everywhere and to testify that Jesus is the one appointed by God to be the judge of all—the living and the dead. ⁴³ He is the one all the prophets testified about, saying that everyone who believes in him will have their sins forgiven through his name.”

Leader: These are Hopeful Words of God. All: Thanks be to God!

Matthew 28:1-10 (GNT)

The Resurrection

¹ After the Sabbath, as Sunday morning was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. ² Suddenly there was a violent earthquake; an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled the stone away, and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴ The guards were so afraid that they trembled and became like dead men.

⁵ The angel spoke to the women. “You must not be afraid,” he said. “I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; he has been raised, just as he said. Come here and see the place where he was lying. ⁷ Go quickly now, and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from death, and now he is going to Galilee ahead of you; there you will see him!’ Remember what I have told you.”

⁸ So they left the tomb in a hurry, afraid and yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Peace be with you.” They came up to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. ¹⁰ “Do not be afraid,” Jesus said to them. “Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”

Leader: This Experience Was Empowering! All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Hallelujah, dear Lord, you are risen! Be present to us now as we study these special Scriptures that tell of your Resurrection. They give us hope and courage to be the

evangelists you have called **us** to be. Let us hear the encouragement of the angel to the women, and Peter's account of Jesus to the Gentile, Cornelius. As we praise God's mighty work and mercy through Jesus his son, let us never take that for granted. Help us move past the fear of crucifixion from Friday into the joy of resurrection today. Thank you for this familiar story yet reveal for each of us a new part of it or a new message we can share with those who do not know you. Let your voice be the one heard today as you speak through mine. Amen.

Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Christ is Risen! Hallelujah! Thank you to those who joined us for Good Friday. I hope it was a meaningful time for you as it was for me. On Friday, we journeyed from the last supper in the Upper Room to Gethsemane and the betrayal of Judas, to Peter's denial where the words of Jesus came true as the rooster crowed, to the trial before Pilate to the Via Dolorosa, the path Christ walked carrying a cross to the hill called Golgotha or Calvary, the crucifixion, earthquake, and the burial. And now we reach the tomb with the two Mary's, who are frightened because the tomb where they had laid their Savior Jesus' wrapped body is now empty!

According to Matthew's gospel, the disciples had fled after Jesus was arrested. According to the Gospel of John, however, the beloved disciple, John, was present at the cross and stayed with Jesus' mother, Mary. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary had walked with Jesus' broken body to the new tomb so generously provided by Joseph of Arimathea, with a stone rolled in front of the entrance. Pilate made sure the body was secure by sending an armed guard to keep watch and to seal the cave with a cord and wax so they would know if anyone had tampered with it or stolen the body.

After the Sabbath was over on Saturday, and at dawn the first day of the week (Sunday) or the third day from the crucifixion, several women

went to the tomb. There was another earthquake and an angel from heaven rolled the stone away, breaking the seal and the cord. The angel's clothing was brilliant white! The soldiers were so afraid they fainted. The angel's message was not meant for the guards anyway; it was for the women present: the one they were looking for was not there. He had risen, just as he said at least three times in Matthew 16:21; 17:23; and 20:19. The Mary's were told to come, see for themselves, and so they did. Matthew does not tell us more detail about what they witnessed, only that they saw no Jesus yet recalled his teachings. The angel told them to go quickly to tell the disciples this news and to go to Galilee where they would see Jesus again (Matt. 26:32).

Up to now, they remained fearful yet obedient. But then on their way, Jesus met them! They fell to his feet to worship him rejoicing, in thanksgiving and wonder! This act of humility was a Middle East custom to show respect and obedience to a king. Jesus allayed their earlier fears by saying, "Do not be afraid. Go tell my brothers" (i.e.: the eleven disciples whom Jesus had taught and loved) to go on to Galilee where he would appear to them.

This is a profound story for our own lives that we recall each year at this time. And there are several interpretive points not to miss. These women at the tomb had loved and followed Jesus his whole ministry, so they too were his disciples. They were important to Jesus! He loved them as well. Traditionally, the woman's role in burials was to mourn with loved ones and to anoint the body with oils and spices. The angel from heaven gave them two more tasks to do that were normally not done by females. First, they were to run to tell the fearful male disciples who were

hiding that Jesus had risen. Second, they were to direct them to Galilee, reassuring the grieving men that Jesus would appear to them in their home community at Galilee. Interesting that Jesus tells the women to deliver the news first to his brethren, his spiritual brothers in ministry, and not to his mother. And unlike today, they were *not* asked to bake a casserole!

The women's original fear had turned to boundless joy as they fulfilled their calling to be the first truth-tellers or evangelists of this miraculous news. Strong's concordance defines evangelist in the Greek as used in the Bible this way: "*euaggelistēs* (from [2097](#) /*euaggelízō*, "evangelize") someone with a *vocational calling from God* to announce the *good news of the Gospel*." Sometimes we are so afraid of that word, evangelist, because of its cultural and religious weight, that we hesitate to explain our own miraculous stories of faith. Yet we know this Easter story of salvation and forgiveness; why can't we tell others how it changed our lives? Surely, when you begin to share your faith with others, there may be a certain fear or hesitation, as there was with the women, but once you begin to share your personal experience of God's love and sacrifice, and how your belief changed your life and lifestyle, the Holy Spirit will put the words into your mouth and suddenly you are filled with joy and enthusiasm for this grace and opportunity to share. That spiritual joy the women felt after meeting the risen Jesus is contagious and not debatable! Letting go of fear and sin is a deeply personal, yet a joyous celebration you will want to share with others!

Can you imagine the women's confidence growing as they saw Jesus? Their Rabbi and friend was no longer broken and bloody as they

had witnessed, but now he was with them again! He had risen as he said he would! Now, by custom, females would never have been messengers to outsiders; that was a man's job. However, they **were** trusted servants and peers of the disciples by now, so they were given the special task of evangelist. Later, when the Pharisaical religious leaders heard this news, they argued that no one had actually seen him rise and walk out of the tomb, so it must be a lie to arouse the people! That was propaganda. There was and is enough evidence, however, to guarantee the resurrection; because of the old and new archeology discoveries, the literary threads woven by academic language study, Jesus' teachings, Old Testament prophecies in Isaiah, the Psalms, and Jeremiah, the linen with a missing body, the many appearances, and Jesus' documented interactions with the women, disciples, and over 500 who saw him, we are secure in our faith that He is risen indeed.

These women did not seek their calling to tell the story! They were chosen as are you and as I was. Peter who denied Christ three times was chosen to be the rock and foundation of the church. Go back and read all of Acts 10 to recall how he was an evangelist to Cornelius and his family, the gentiles. Read more about Paul who evangelized to many and planted so many churches. Like Moses, David, Rahab the harlot, the fishermen, the woman at the well, Onesimus the slave, and Paul, God selected the unlikely to be his messengers. So, if you feel ill equipped to share the Easter story, you're in good company! Only through the meek and humble can God's tremendous power and glory shine through! So Happy Easter, He is Risen, Hallelujah! Jesus transformed us, and we are redeemed through today's miracle of resurrection. Amen. //

Will you pray with me? Lord, we are awed by your willingness to face trials and pain for God's glory. We confessed our sins and now accept your forgiveness, strength, and amazing love. As we celebrate your resurrection this day, let us share the Easter story with friends and family, especially those who don't know you personally. Help us to have humility, courage, and obedience to be sharers of the good news. Be with those here only in spirit. Today, we rejoice and pray in Jesus' name, **Amen.**