

April 16 2017 Easter Sunday

Reading from the Bible John 20:1-18

Matthew 28:1-15

Sermon *"It Worked!"*

The silence on Saturday, after Good Friday was terrific. You know that kind of silence; you know what happens after you come home from the cemetery. You have had a full day there and you go to bed and then you wake up the next morning. It is all true. The death was real. Grief was settling in hard and heavy. Friday was the worst day of their lives. And then dutifully the women who had been with Jesus to the very end, Mary Magdalene and his mother Mary who had watched him taken down from the cross and who had been with him as they laid him in the tomb. They had watched the stone, the great stone settle into its channel sealing the tomb. They had seen the guard that was set. Why in the world, couldn't they have let Jesus alone? Why did they have to set a guard? Couldn't they have left him alone now that he was dead? Reality had sunk in even more by Sunday, the first day of the week, the day after the Sabbath. Dutifully and loving they went after the Jewish Sabbath. You notice, strangely, there were no disciples to be seen anywhere. The women went to face the guard, not knowing what opposition they might face; not knowing, how in the world, they were going to roll that stone away. And then the very best day of their lives dawned and somewhere along the path to the cemetery they left one world and entered another. This resurrection stuff was going to take a little while to get used to.

In the Cotton Patch Gospel, Clarence Jordan reset the story, the stories of Jesus. The setting was the 1960 Civil Rights warfare that raged across the United States. They would have had Jesus lynched by the powers to be and they had the disciples gathered and sad and then Jesus appeared to them. Disclaimer - I am not going to jump like Jesus does in the play. That is too scary this morning. Jesus hops out and says, "It worked! It worked! I am alive"—"touch me, it worked!" For sure his disciples did not expect it. Sure he had raised Lazarus but who was going to raise him? None of them. Sure, he had said over and over again some of those odd things that they had pretty well denied. He had said, "The Son of man must suffer." Jesus had said, "You can destroy this temple and in three days I will rebuild it." And when they finally asked for a sign, He said, "Look at the sign of Jonah. Remember he was three days in the belly of the fish and he said. "The Son of Man would be in heart of the earth for three days." It's pretty clear in some of these predictions from Matthew especially that Jesus was going to suffer and he was going to be killed. And it was common knowledge according to the Pharisees and Sanhedrin that they had heard him say, "In three days I will arise." They were so

nervous about that threat and they got it, they heard it and that was why they posted the guards. And that's why when the soldiers told their story that he was gone that they told the guards to prefabricate the story.-“Here is some money and you just keep up this story and it will all be OK.” They took Jesus word literally. Jesus was the stone that was rejected. Jesus was the one that reminded them of the suffering servant in Isaiah. He was the Anointed One who by his stripes we would be healed and would bring those to life. Somewhere along the path to the cemetery the women left one world and entered another. The evil, hopeless- might makes-right- world, where dead people stayed dead, they left that world behind them. Suddenly these two women experienced an earthquake; an earthquake is quite a thing to experience. How many of you have been in an earthquake? Would you volunteer for it again? No thanks! I was in one on Ash Wednesday when that one destroyed a lot of things around Olympia. And the concrete floor in the Fellowship Hall in the Presbyterian Church had a crack in it like this. It was in the concrete floor. No thanks! The second earthquake I was in, I was on the twelfth floor in St. Joseph Hospital. It is the most earthquake proof building at that time in Tacoma. I didn't care how it was planned, all I knew it was doing this shaking the floors. And I was serving as a chaplain in the mental clinic. Earthquake—no thank you! Now Palestine did have frequent earthquakes so the women may have been through more than one. But they certainly never had one where a huge stone was rolled away by a shining angel and he was sitting on it. He said,“ I know who you are looking for. He isn't here. He is gone. He has been raised. Don't be afraid.” In fact the soldiers were more afraid. The Scripture has a little fun with it. The soldiers looked like dead men. They looked like corpses. They are weak, pale, shaking and just frozen in place. The dead man they were guarding is gone and they looked like dead men. And two women who are supposed to move the stone were having a visit with an angel. “Do not be afraid” actually they would never need to fear again and neither would we because of what Jesus did. He won over humankind arch enemy-death and it was destroyed. And here we have simple directions from the angel- come see—go tell. The directions were not difficult. And the woman followed them exactly. They went in and they found the grave cloths. When you read the other gospels the disciples couldn't find the body and they looked in and they believed. I always wondered, did they believe that Jesus arose or did they just believe he was gone. But the women had no doubt because they had talked to an angel; they had had an earthquake; they had seen the stone moved and had seen Jesus alive. The women were on a mission. They had a fabulous message. Mark says some disciples didn't quite believe them. You know Mary Magadane had always been a bit high strung, the Mary mother of Jesus what, could you expect, she wanted to believe her son was alive. And of course at that time, women could not be witnesses in a court of law. They couldn't testify in

court. Although they had the best news, they were in a dangerous and critical world. And Jesus greets them and if you look at all the versions of the Bible you will find different translations what really says something like “Grace be to you- rejoice- rejoice.” He didn’t just say, “Hi there” or “Here I am” or “hello.” It is something so filled with the joy. Then the truth is he says to tell his brothers to go to Galilee and there was even a little hint that they had been restored. Those yellow-bellied disciples who had ran away, except for John who had taken Jesus’ mother under his care. Their deep failures at the time of Jesus’ deepest need were set aside and he is coming to them. Tragedy had been turned to victory. The resurrection of Jesus is the Messiah; he is raised by God. Jesus didn’t just go to death and then self-raised himself. God raised him. Jesus had set aside all as a divine person and become human being even to the point of death. No human could achieve reconciliation with God; it is an abundant new life; and life eternal. Today we celebrate resurrection Easter Sunday. The early church called every Sunday a little resurrection Sunday. Resurrection was ever present. We know it is not just a point in time but for a life time. Jesus said don’t be afraid to follow me. Don’t be afraid to experience a new day. Don’t be afraid to be gracious and recognize newness of life in other people. Don’t be afraid to drop what you doing and be part of the kingdom of God and what the Holy Spirit can and can’t do. Don’t be afraid to live a life of worship of Jesus, the Messiah; the Ointment One. We need to see the world in history and God with all new eyes; with Easter eyes maybe touched by that power that changed the Easter eggs to color. It might be like this grandpa that I heard about yesterday. The man had been colorblind all his life. He never saw color. It is like when you are on the computer and you change the picture from color to gray tone. He never saw color. On his birthday his grandkids decided to surprise, they bought him enchroma glasses so he could see color. He put them on and he began to sob for he saw the world in color for the first time in his life.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, we rejoice this Easter with thankful hearts. For Jesus Christ is raised today. Thank you for loving us so much that you sent your only Son Jesus to become one of us. He suffered and died on the cross and was raised from the dead giving us new life and new hope. We ask for your abundant life and fill our hearts this day and everyday forever. Amen