

Text: Matthew 28:1-10. Easter Festival service. **April 20, 2014.**

The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed!

What's the big deal about Easter? People buy special bonnets, eat chocolate bunnies, pack restaurants for brunch. Is that the big deal about Easter? Bonnets and bunnies and brunch? Churches have more people in them on Easter, maybe not as many as restaurants, but... is that the big deal about Easter, putting in your hour, with the bonnet, after the bunny, before the brunch? What's the big deal about Easter? What is the big deal about Easter?

Let's look at the first people to hear the good news about the first Easter. Women. A fine example. They came early, even while it was still dark and dangerous to walk. They went to see the tomb, to look at it, to gaze on it, expecting to find a dead Jesus. Does that describe you? Coming early, happily jumping out of bed before the alarm goes off, excited to come and see Jesus? Or did you hit the snooze several times, groaned a loud groan, made it here at 8:59 and said, "Well, at least mom will be happy I made it?" Are you expecting to find a dead Jesus, some dusty stories about a guy from long ago, that really doesn't matter today? Is that your idea of Easter?

Look at what the women saw. A miracle! The unexpected! An earthquake. Easter literally rocked the world! That's the big deal about Easter. Easter rocked the world, down to its very foundation. An angel of the Lord came and rolled away the stone. This stone that covered the entrance to Jesus' grave was huge! It usually took twenty men, that's right, twenty, to roll it into place. And just this one angel rolls it away like it's a pebble. This angel rolled away the stone, not so Jesus could get out. This stone couldn't keep him in. The angel rolled away the stone so people could come and see in. The women came and they saw. They saw an angel. They saw a rolled away stone. They saw an empty grave. But they did not see the body of Jesus. The body was gone. The body had risen! The body is alive. That's the big deal about Easter.

Now, this angel had a face like lightning and clothes white as snow, glad the snow is finally gone. But there was not gladness in these women when they saw this lightning face and snow white clothes. They were afraid. Why? Why would they be afraid to see an angel? They were good people. They were doing a good thing for Jesus. They went to see his tomb in the dangerous darkness. They were there at the cross. They didn't abandon Jesus like his closest followers. Why were they afraid? Because they were sinners. Who knows what guilt they carried to that tomb? Mary Magdalene had seven demons driven out of her. What did she feel like? The other Mary had asked Jesus, "Can my sons push their way to the front of the line and have the greatest places in heaven?" What guilt was she carrying from that?

What about you? What guilt did you bring with you today? Dreading the Easter family gathering because you still feel guilty for fighting over mom's stuff? Pushed your way to the front to get what you wanted and only now do you realize the stuff was not worth wrecking my relationship with my siblings? What guilt is on your heart? What makes you afraid to see an angel, to see Jesus? Maybe you are surprised the church is still standing, that God even let you in after how long you have been gone. Maybe you are smiling an equally sinful self-righteous smile that Pastor is letting them have it, you know, them, those people who only come to church on Easter. I hope you brought your guilt. I hope you brought your fears.

Here's the big deal about Easter. Guilt is buried in that tomb and left for dead. Fears are buried with Jesus and stay with Jesus. Guilt and fear are gone with one word, one single word. Risen! That's what

the angel said. Risen! Risen! That's the big deal about Easter. Risen! He is risen! He is risen to conquer fear. He is risen to conquer guilt. Risen to leave your guilt buried. Risen to leave your fears behind. Risen! That's the big deal about Easter. Risen! That's the word that matters. Risen! If you only remember one word from this whole sermon, please, please, please, remember this word, "Risen!" That's the big deal about Easter.

But why? Why is risen such a big deal? Well, let's take a look. Risen means that Jesus is perfect. We don't have to be good enough for God. Jesus was already perfect in our place. Lots of people died on crosses. Only one of them was perfect: Jesus. Only one of them is risen. Jesus. He is risen means he is perfect. He is risen means your sins are forgiven. God accepted the perfect sacrifice of the perfect Jesus. He is risen means God put his stamp of 100% approval on Jesus and stamped out all your sins, all your guilt, all your fears, forever. He is risen means Jesus keeps all his promises. He is risen, just as he said! Just as he said. Jesus promised, "I will rise!" He rose. Jesus promised, "Surely I am with you always." Jesus is with us always. One last thing he is risen means. Probably the best of all. You will rise. Really. Your body will rise from your grave just like Jesus' body rose from his grave. All who believe in Jesus will not die, but live, live forever, live in perfection, live with Jesus. Perfect life forever with Jesus, with your perfect resurrected body. That's the big deal about Easter.

Ok. So that's nice for the future, that at some point, which I hope is still fifty years away, when I die I'll be with Jesus. But that's fifty years away. What does Easter matter now? What's the big deal about Easter today, tomorrow? We get to go and tell. We get to be God's angels, God's messengers to go and tell this good news. We get to go quickly. See that word twice? Go quickly and tell. They hurried. Time is wasting. Go quickly and tell. Maybe you've never heard this good news before today. That's ok. Who better to go and tell than someone who has excitement of hearing it for the first time? Bury your first time fears in the tomb and find one friend to tell. Maybe you left those Easter invitation cards sit and just didn't get around to giving one to your neighbor who knows you go to church. Bury that guilt in the grave. Go quickly and tell him. Don't let your Easter joy vanish at brunch. Take that joy and spread it. Share it. Tell it. If you are afraid, there's precedent for that. The women were afraid, yet filled with joy. They let their joy overcome their fear.

Because they knew something. They knew they were brothers and sisters with Jesus. Jesus told them so. Did you notice that word that Jesus used? Brothers. Go and tell my brothers. These followers of Jesus were not slaves who did Jesus' bidding. They were brothers, close friends, colleagues in going and telling this good news. They were brothers. And so are you. Jesus called all his baptized people not only his children, but also his brothers and sisters. Wow! That's pretty cool. The Bible even says that Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers. No one here is the black sheep in the family of Jesus. You are brothers. No one is the far away person who has to call on Easter because he can't make it in person. You are brothers. Maybe you don't have a bunch to take for brunch. Maybe you are a party of one today. That's ok. You are brothers with Jesus. And my wife said I can right now invite you all to our house, to celebrate Easter with your Christian brothers and sisters. Seriously. You have a forever brother in Jesus. That's the big deal about Easter. He is risen! That's the big deal about Easter. He is risen indeed! That's the big deal about Easter. Amen.