

Text: Matthew 28:1-10.

Easter festival.

April 12, 2020.

The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed!

What's Easter all about? Bunnies. Bonnets. Brunch buffet? What's Easter all about? Hammy and family and candy o my! I went into a store the day after Valentine's Day and saw Easter candy? That was almost two months ago! Is that what Easter is all about? What's Easter all about? I'm torn. Not on what Easter is all about, but whether or not to give you the Bible's answer up front and then risk the thought, "I don't have to listen. I already have the answer." Of course, if I wait to unfold the Bible's answer, the thoughts of brunch and candy might have you not listening as closely. Can we do this? Is it ok if I share the Bible's answer now and then we unpack? Is that ok? What's Easter all about? No fear. Fear is gone. Fear of death. Fear of sin. Fear that I'm not good with God. What's Easter all about? My guilt is gone. My guilt is buried. What's Easter all about? The Lord is risen! The Lord is risen! Jesus defeated death so you will defeat death. Jesus rose and so you will rise. Jesus kept his promise. Jesus provides the evidence. And we get to help him spread this greatest message of all! Wow! Wow! What greater message could there be? I know that was quite a list. Let's review it quickly. What's Easter all about? No fear. Guilt gone. The Lord is risen. I will rise. Jesus kept his promise.

Yeah, there's a lot of cool details in the Bible. But Easter isn't all about the details. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary really loved Jesus. They got up at dawn to look at the tomb. They went when it was dark and dangerous. But those are details.

There was an earthquake! Wow! The Earth itself jumped for joy at Jesus' resurrection. An angel came, rolled back the stone and sat on it. Sitting means work is done. Jesus' work of saving us is done. The angel rolled back the stone not so Jesus could get out. But so we could see in and see for ourselves, "The Lord is risen!" Now we are getting closer to what Easter is all about. But we wouldn't know the meaning, the significance of these great acts without God telling us. The guards, these tough, rugged soldiers, who had to have the easiest assignment ever: keep a dead guy in a grave, they couldn't do it, not when God's plan was different. The guards earthquaked, literally and became like dead men.

Now we are getting closer to what Easter is all about, or maybe why Easter is so wonderful. Why all the quaking, from big, tough men? Why fear from women who loved and followed Jesus? Women who didn't run away when Jesus was in trouble, but who stood by him, helped to bury him, got up early and braved danger for Jesus? Why were they afraid? If anyone could have been sure they were good with Jesus because of all the love they showed him, surely it was Mary and Mary. Yet they were afraid, when they saw an angel. Why?

Maybe ask yourself that question. Why would you be afraid today? What fears cling to your heart, your soul? I think I've done enough good, but I can't be sure I'm good with God. I'm trying my best now, but there's that sin in my past that I wouldn't admit to anyone, let alone God! I wasn't sure if the walls would hold up when I came in this morning. It's been a long time since I've been to church. I was hoping no one would notice. And now the guy in the white gown is calling me out! And the sly smiles of the self-righteous start to appear. Pastor, thanks for being God's angel and letting those bad people have it. I've been here 52 times since last Easter, 66 times if you count all the special services. The self-righteous should shake the most. Why? Sin! All that fear is rooted in sin. All that smugness is sin oozing out. Sin makes us shake. Our failures bring fear.

But listen! Listen! Really listen! Here's what Easter is all about! Do not be afraid! Did you hear that? Do not be afraid! The message of the angel at the empty tomb is what Easter is all about. That message begins with these wonderful words, "Do not be afraid!" Stop being afraid. Put your fears in this tomb and leave them for dead! Bury your guilt in this grave and leave it there. Walk away with no guilt. Leave with no fear! No fear. That's what Easter is all about. No more guilt. That's what Easter is all about. How can we be sure. He was crucified. He has risen. Man! There's the best news ever spoken. He was crucified. Jesus paid for all our sins. Jesus died for all our fears. Jesus was nailed to a cross for all your guilt. Guilt gone! He was crucified. Fear, forever, far from you. He was crucified. He was crucified and the effects continue. Your sins are forgiven. Your guilt is gone. I will not apologize for repeating that. Can we ever hear too often what Easter is all about? Your fears are forgiven. Your guilt is gone.

He has risen! He has risen! He has risen! I know there's a lot of repeating. But come on, what can we say better than the angel of the Lord himself said? He has risen! What could possibly be better news? He has risen! Jesus is stronger than death. Think about that. Jesus defeated death. Death appears to be the winner. AT the end of the day death appears to defeat everyone. Whether you die in a plane crash or from coronavirus or go peacefully in your sleep at age 98, death appears to win. But death didn't win with Christ. Christ won. And so Christians will win. Christ rose and so Christians will rise. Christ lives and so Christians will live. We don't worship a dead guy. We worship a living guy, a living Savior, the one and only who defeated death.

And he called his shot. He has risen! Just as he said! Can you imagine hearing someone say, "I will rise from the dead!"? At first you probably think, "This guy is out of his mind." And that's what many people said about Jesus. You might also file it away in your mind. I'm keeping my eye on this guy. And that's what some people did. But when this guy actually rises from the dead, now he's got my attention. Maybe this guy can do what he says. Maybe, and really there's no maybe, he keeps his promises. You know what Jesus promised? Because I live, you will live. I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever lives and believes in me will never die. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world. Surely I am with you always. Think Jesus keeps his promises? Absolutely. That's what Easter is all about. Don't be afraid. He has risen. Just as he said.

So what? What does that matter for me? What am I supposed to do? The angel addressed that as well. What the angel said to Mary and Mary, the angel says also to us. Come and see. Go and tell. Come and see. There's real evidence. The grave clothes that were wrapped around Jesus are still here. But Jesus' body is not. This wasn't a grave robbery. This was a resurrection. It's fascinating that those who filed away Jesus' promise to rise were some of the first to be confronted with the evidence and the first to make a false story. They didn't just deny the resurrection. They couldn't. They made up a different story. Come and see. Look into this tomb. There is real evidence. Those who first heard the news were the first to preach the resurrection. And they were among the first to die rather than stop preaching this resurrection. Die for a lie? Doesn't happen! Come and see. There is evidence! More than 500 eyewitnesses. At one time! Mass hallucination? No way! Come and see. There is evidence.

Go and tell. Quickly. The angel told them to start with people they knew. Friends. Many people followed Jesus because a family member invited them. Going and telling isn't primarily about the church reaching out to strangers. Going and telling is about people who know what Easter is all about going and telling to people you already know. Maybe you feel the fear and cheer the women had. Afraid, yet filled with joy. Religion divides my family. I get it. Mine too. But can you simply say, "I'm glad our family can get

together to celebrate Jesus' resurrection"? Maybe my next door neighbor doesn't want to hear about Jesus. But would he like to be free from fear? Think he'd like the assurance of a perfect eternity? I'm not allowed to talk at work. I understand. But can your joy show first and tell second? Can a casual conversation about the weekend go beyond bunnies and brunches? Can you say, "I love Easter because my guilt is gone. Jesus buried it." Could you say that much? "I forget my fears on Easter because Jesus rose." We have seen such good news. Go and tell.

There was one more thing the women did. They grabbed onto Jesus and worshipped him. They grabbed on for dear life, for dear eternal life. And they were not letting go. Maybe they grabbed his feet because they were down on their faces. Maybe they grabbed his feet, because if they had his feet, they could keep those feet from moving and keep Jesus from leaving. But they held on. They worshipped him. They weren't going to let Jesus go. Easter isn't just about a one morning high and then life goes back to normal. Their lives were never the same. These women and other followers of Jesus, they started to gather every Sunday to celebrate Jesus' resurrection. We still gather every Sunday to celebrate Jesus' resurrection, to hold on to Jesus, to worship him. We gather on Thursdays too. That's what Easter is all about. Freedom from fear lets me be free to hang onto Jesus. No more guilt means I get to worship Jesus, without guilt, but with only joy. Heaven open means I hang on to Jesus, hang on for life and for eternal life. He is risen! I will rise! He is risen! I'm going to heaven! He is risen! I'm grabbing onto Jesus and never letting go. That's what Easter is all about. Amen.

The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed!