

Sermon for March 27, 2016 – Easter Sunday

Matthew 28:1-10 (NIV84)

Theme: Rejoice! Jesus is Risen!

- 1) Risen to show His enemies powerless!
- 2) Risen to fulfill His promises!
- 3) Risen to give His followers joy!

*After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. <sup>2</sup> There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. <sup>3</sup> His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. <sup>4</sup> The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. <sup>5</sup> The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. <sup>6</sup> He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. <sup>7</sup> Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you." <sup>8</sup> So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. <sup>9</sup> Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. <sup>10</sup> Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.*

I had an uncle who was a Catholic missionary in Angola. One fall, when I was a child, I got to talk to him on the phone. He promised to come and visit me in the spring. Hearing about his visit gave me great joy.

Unfortunately, he had enemies and his enemies killed him just before Christmas. Death prevented my uncle from keeping his promise. Death prevented me from having joy.

Jesus promised his followers many wonderful things: forgiveness of sins, freedom from their enemies, eternal life with God, etc. . . . These promises gave his followers great joy. But Jesus' enemies killed him. Did all of Jesus' promises die with him on the cross? No, actually the opposite came true. You see, Jesus is not like my uncle or any other human on this earth. Death could not prevent him from keeping his promises because death could not prevent him from coming back to life.

With the Gospel of St. Matthew as our guide, let us **rejoice, for Christ is risen!** 1) *He is risen to show his enemies powerless.* 2) *He is risen to keep his promises.* 3) *He is risen to give his followers joy.*

Part One: He is risen to show his enemies powerless

As the light of the sun glowed on the horizon and the early birds started to sing on the morning of that first Easter in Jerusalem, there was no indication that this Sunday was going to be any different than any Sunday before it. There was, however, tension in the air.

Just two days earlier a man name Jesus was crucified for claiming to be the Messiah - the promised King of the Jews. Many people held him in honor – considering him to be a great prophet. His many miracles and powerful teaching led some people to wonder whether or not he wasn't the Savior the Scriptures foretold. But here's the problem: his enemies killed him. "How could this be?" his followers thought. "How could Jesus die if he truly was the Messiah? Didn't he promise that he was going to establish a new kind of Kingdom on this earth? How can he do that from the grave?" And so all their hope seemed to die with Jesus on the cross.

What Jesus followers failed to realize was that, since the wages of sin is death, it was necessary for the Savior to die in order to pay for their sins. But they couldn't think about that. The image of their dear friend and teacher, disfigured and suffering on the cross, was so etched in their minds, that all they could focus on was their loss, and their hopelessness.

Jesus' enemies, however, were ecstatic that they were finally rid of him. But they also remembered something his followers had forgotten. Jesus said that he would rise on the third day after he died. Now, Jesus' enemies didn't actually think Jesus would rise from the dead; that would be impossible! They were, however, afraid of Jesus' body being stolen. This is why, with Pilate's permission, they sealed Jesus' tomb and posted armed guards around it. They wanted to make sure this dead man remained dead.

Little did Jesus' enemies realize, however that Jesus was not a mere man. He was who he claimed to be: the Messiah - the LORD incarnate! Even though the world, death and the devil did their best to overcome Jesus, He showed his enemies powerless by rising from the grave.

Our text tells us that, as dawn was about to break, *there was a violent earthquake*. At the moment this earthquake happened, *an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, and going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it*. Note that the angel didn't come to let Jesus out of the tomb, he came to show Jesus' enemies that he was already gone. The tomb was empty! Jesus had risen from the dead!

The angel's *appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow*. *The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men*. The guards fainted in fear. When they came to, they fled at his sight. Try as they might, Jesus enemies could not keep him in the grave.

Already in this short account, there is reason for us to rejoice: Jesus' resurrection shows not only that his earthly enemies are powerless, but also that our great spiritual enemies – sin, death and the devil – are powerless as well.

Here's how it works: the Bible says that *the wages of sin is death*<sup>1</sup>. Jesus, however, died as someone who never sinned in payment for sin. Now, since Jesus payed for our sins, death could not hold him. He rose from the dead, showing that sin had been paid for in full.

Now, since sin has been paid for and death defeated, the devil lost the very tools he used for our destruction. Without the ability to hang sin over our heads and threaten us with eternal death in hell, he is powerless against us. We are now free! And we receive this freedom through faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: Jesus' resurrection marks the beginning of a new era. The wall of sin that separated us from God has been removed. We now can come before our God without fear – trusting in his mercy and love to forgive our sins for Christ's sake. Look at the proof: the tomb is empty, and Jesus' enemies run in fear. Rejoice! Jesus is risen to show his enemies powerless.

Part Two: He is risen to fulfill his promises.

Shortly after the soldiers ran away in fear, the sun began to peek over the horizon. At that moment some women were on their way to the tomb to pay their last respects to Jesus: the man they loved and trusted as their Savior. They waited until Sunday, because Jewish law forbade them to do any work on the Sabbath. How fearful it must have been for them to go to the tomb – wondering whether or not Jesus' enemies would be looking for opportunities to arrest his followers. Yet, out of love and respect for their Savior, they boldly went – in spite of the danger.

We can't help but wonder what was going through their minds. "Jesus, our dearest Jesus, is dead! Why did he have to die? He was our greatest hope. He was so good both to us and all he met. How could God allow this to happen to him? What will we do now?"

When the women reached the tomb, they were in complete shock! The tomb was open and Jesus' body was gone! As sorrow and confusion began to overwhelm them, the angel, who kept watch over the tomb, appeared to them and said, "*Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.'* Now I have told you."

Why were the women so sad, confused and afraid? Didn't they remember prophecies like the 16<sup>th</sup> Psalm, in which Jesus said: "*you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay?*"<sup>ii</sup> Didn't they take to heart the many times Jesus prophesied, not only his death, but also his resurrection on the third day?

But, shocked at Jesus death, they forgot all these promises. All they could focus on was their sorrow and loss. Don't misunderstand me: it wasn't wrong for Jesus followers to be sad. Their sin was allowing their sadness to turn into despair – thinking that all was lost, that Jesus wasn't really the Messiah.

The angel's message dispelled their fears: "*He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.*" The angel points to the empty tomb as proof of this fact. Jesus kept his promise. He wanted the women to go back and tell the others what they had seen and heard.

Here is another reason for us to rejoice: Jesus has kept His promises. He promised to suffer and die for our sins. He promised to defeat sin and death by rising from the grave. And Jesus has kept his promises. All of our sins have been forgiven. His resurrection proves it.

There are many more things Jesus has promised in Scripture to do for us. For example, the Lord promises to rescue believers from every evil attack and bring us safely to his heavenly kingdom.<sup>iii</sup> He promises to work in all things for the good of those who love him.<sup>iv</sup> He promises to raise us from the dead just as he rose from the dead.<sup>v</sup>

Jesus' resurrection proves that he will keep all these promises, regardless of how fantastic and unbelievable they may seem to our sinful human heart. Rejoice, therefore, because Jesus didn't just rise to show his enemies powerless. He also rose to keep his promises.

### Part Three: He is risen to give us joy

After listening to the angel, the women ran from the tomb. At first they ran in fear, but soon that fear was replaced with joy. "Could it be true? Is Jesus, our dear Savior, alive from the grave? It seems too good to be true, but an angel himself has told us!" Thus they ran to tell the others this wonderful news.

*Suddenly Jesus met them, "Greetings," he said.* The word translated here as "greetings" literally means, "rejoice." It was a common Greek greeting in the ancient world, but Jesus brought new meaning to it.

"Rejoice!" The reason for the women's joy was right in front of them: Jesus himself, risen and alive! Overcome with the emotion of being in the presence of their Savior, *they came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him.*

"Do not be afraid," Jesus said. He was risen, just as he promised. He most certainly was their Messiah. The forgiveness and salvation he promised to them was real.

Jesus went on to say, "*Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.*" He calls his disciples "brothers" and oh, what a term this is! Through faith in Christ we are adopted into God's family. God is our Father and Jesus our brother! What an awesome message of peace and joy Jesus gave these women. How glad they were to tell His disciples.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: Jesus is risen to give us joy! Through faith in his resurrection we are at peace with God. Through faith in Him we know that, when He comes again on the Last Day, we will be raised to life and see him as he truly is. Death cannot separate us from him. Death cannot separate believers from each other! Because He lives, we too shall live. Therefore, brothers and sisters in Christ, rejoice: The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Romans 6:23 NIV84

<sup>ii</sup> Psalm 16:10 NIV84

<sup>iii</sup> cf. 2 Timothy 4:18

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<sup>iv</sup> cf. Romans 8:28

<sup>v</sup> cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:16