

April 12, 2020 • Easter Sunday • Online Worship

## “Christ Is Risen!”

Homily by Rev. Patricia Farris



Matthew 28:1-10

*After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message for you.” So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”*

Remember our Easter call and response? I want us to start out this morning by whispering it together. I say: “Christ is Risen!” and you respond: “HE IS RISEN INDEED!”

We’re whispering this morning because it’s dark. Easter always begins in darkness. In the darkness of the real world as we know it. It begins in the darkness of the night before dawn, in the darkness of our hearts, the darkness of this world.

As the story goes, the women are out, before dawn, walking to the tomb. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. Walking to the tomb, making their way in the dark. Walking towards what they believe to be the place of death, their hearts are heavy with sorrow and grief, full of anxiety and dread. Being out means making themselves vulnerable, identifying as followers of Jesus, risking arrest by the authorities. Their eyes red and swollen after a night of weeping. There is so much they do not know and cannot yet understand. It is dark. Yet, they are walking. Walking to the place of loss, hurt and need.

This year, I think of them as “first responders.” Terms that first came into common currency after the 9/11 attacks and other acts of terror, first responders are those brave heroes and heroines who, in the moment, rush towards the danger, into the chaos, into the place of loss, hurt and need to save lives. To save life! They know the risk, and they go anyway.

This week I read an interview with some of our very brave doctors, nurses, respiratory therapists, technicians...health care providers working in Emergency Rooms, Intensive Care Units, field hospitals such as those in convention centers across the country and the one now set up and operational inside the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City. Some speak of their fear, and their fear of infecting their families with the virus. And yet, they press on because they have committed themselves to care for the sick and the vulnerable. Their commitment to care, this love, does not remove their fear. But it fuels and sustains their courage.

This way of living, and caring, this way of loving others, is a way of fearing courageously. It’s the Way of Jesus and his followers in every age.

And so the women, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, get up while it is still dark and begin walking towards the tomb. Expecting to find it sealed up. Hoping somehow to be able to anoint the body of their friend and teacher. But just as they arrived at the tomb, the place of death, something unimaginable happened!

The earth shook and an angel came and rolled back the stone and sat upon it. I love that little detail in the story. The angel of the Lord descended from heaven itself and rolled back the stone that had sealed up that tomb to keep death inside...the angel just rolled away that stone, pushed it aside, and then just...hmpfffff....sat down on it as if to say: “Take that, death.....You lost!”

Whisper it with me again: Christ is Risen! HE IS RISEN INDEED!”

The women, our brave first responders here, were scarcely ready to whisper. The angel could see it on their astonished, frightened faces. The guards standing by were so afraid that they ‘shook and became like dead men’ the Scripture says. We know *that* feeling, don’t we? There have been times in these last weeks and surely more to come, when we shake and become like dead, in our own fear. Knowing this the angel of God says to Jesus’ disciples, and is still saying to us now: “Do not be afraid...you’re looking for the one who was crucified. He’s not here. He has been raised from the dead and is going on ahead of you to Galilee. Go and tell the others.”

Christ is Risen! HE IS RISEN INDEED!

And the women go running to tell the others. And they go, the Scripture says, with fear *and* great joy. Fear *and* great joy! They go “fearing courageously.” And they become our model for faithful living through these dark times. Fearing courageously. Wearing a special kind of what we might call “night goggles of faith” to equip them to see clearly even in the dark.

Earlier this week as I was pondering this passage again, and its power for us, its gift of life to us on this Easter 2020, another Scripture passage popped into my head. It’s one we usually hear in Advent, just before Christmas, not at Easter. But here’s what came into my head and heart on my morning walk. Remember how it says.... “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;” said the prophet Isaiah, “those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined.” And how the Gospel of Matthew, from which we hear the Easter story this morning, picks up that theme: “the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death, light has dawned.”

Light dawns. The women, fearlessly courageous, start walking in darkness, but just as they arrive at the tomb, the first day of the week was dawning. Light dawns.

And of *this* light, this Easter light, this Resurrection light, the Gospel of John proclaims: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ...What has come into being was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

Got it?! We’ve come full circle. Our God who said in the very beginning of it all: “Let there be light!” has again, now in Christ Jesus, brought light out of darkness. The light shines in the darkness, even now. Even in these dark and difficult days. Charles Wesley put it this way in one of our great hymns: “Light and life to all he brings, risen with healing in his wings!”

Christ is Risen! HE IS RISEN INDEED!

This is our story! This is our song! God chooses to be with us in love, overcoming the darkness of our lives and of this world. God sends Jesus in the darkest dark of the night. In that night, God’s love in Christ Jesus triumphs over the power of hopelessness and fear and a special star shines so bright that the whole of the night sky is brilliant with light. And years later, again in the dark darkness of the night, the stone is rolled away from the face of the tomb. God’s love in Christ Jesus triumphs over all the powers of death. And the sun dawns on that morn to pierce the darkness with rays of healing and hope.

The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has never overcome it. And so, should you wake in the night, and all the fears loom up, pray with the Psalmist and God’s people through the ages: “You, O Lord, are my lamp; my God, you make my darkness bright.”

And so, dear brothers and sisters, together we will live through these days, sometimes fearing, yes, but fearing courageously, wearing our night goggles of faith in moments when we do not know when the light will come, but walking on, together, moving from darkness to light, confident that the Light will come.

Christ, the Light of the World, is with us now and forever.

Lord Jesus: rise in our hearts.  
Lord Jesus: rise in our homes.  
Lord Jesus: rise in our streets.  
Lord Jesus: rise in our world

Let’s shout it out now:

Christ is Risen! HE IS RISEN INDEED!  
Christ is Risen! HE IS RISEN INDEED!

Notes:

Paraphrase of Fleming Rutledge, “Advent Begins in the Dark,” from *The Bible and the New York Times*.

Warren Kinghorn. “Fearing Courageously in the Face of COVID-19.” Religious News Service, April 7, 2020.

Charles Wesley. “Hark the Herald Angels Sing!” UMH #240

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