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Matthew 28:1-10

I Believe in the Resurrection of the Body

Rev. Kerry Smith

Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Matthew 28:1-10 New Revised Standard Version

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.”

Does music ever make you cry? This week I was at a lecture and when it is a lecture at a church you have to sing, and we sang this song that I have sung before, but when we got to verse 2, I started to cry. This is verse 2 of “For the Healing of the Nations”. “Lead us forward into freedom, from despair your world release, that, redeemed from war and hatred, all may come and go in peace. Show us how through care and goodness fear will die and hope increase.” This Easter we proclaim as followers of the Risen Christ that fear will die and hope increase. We proclaim that we will work to help everyone in our world to go in peace.

During the six weeks of Lent this year we have been working our way through the Apostles’ Creed and the Creed ends where Easter begins, with the resurrection and the promise of life everlasting. We started this season of Lent on Ash Wednesday with ashes being placed on our foreheads as we heard the words, “Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.” Just a few days ago on Good Friday we remembered that Christ died for our sins and today on Easter morning we celebrate that Jesus rose victorious over death.[[1]](#footnote-2) We proclaim that there is hope, there there is new life.

Just yesterday some of us procrastinators were sending in our taxes. And then we gave a big sign of relief when we realized that we have until tomorrow! Benjamin Franklin is attributed with saying that in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes. In fact, of life’s two certainties, taxes are the only one for which you can get an automatic extension. Death is the shared experience of all human beings. We will all bury someone we love, we will wrestle with our own mortality and we will wonder and hope that there is something beyond this life.[[2]](#footnote-3)

As Christians we believe that in Jesus’ death and resurrection, God gave a definitive answer to the existential questions of death and life beyond death. Jesus was crucified, dead, and buried and his friends grieved and mourned his death. Those same friends claimed that on Sunday morning Jesus stepped out of the tomb. He is alive! Men and women said that they had seen Jesus, eaten with Jesus, touched Jesus, and had been taught by him for forty days after his death.[[3]](#footnote-4)

Jesus’ disciples had gone into hiding after his death. They had been afraid for their lives, but they boldly stepped into the streets to proclaim that he had risen. Paul had rejected following Jesus and had persecuted Christians, and he had an encounter and a vision of the risen Christ that was a profound experience for him. In 1 Corinthians 15:54 Paul quotes Isaiah 25:8 to say, “Death has been swallowed up by a victory.” We believe in life beyond death because Jesus rose from the dead, the disciples bore witness to it, and those who came later had profound experiences with the risen Christ.[[4]](#footnote-5)

I love that in the stories that we have of Jesus’ resurrection, Jesus is constantly having to tell people to not be afraid. Jesus knows that we are terrified of death and Jesus offers his disciples and us a peace that sustains us even in the face of great tragedy and pain.[[5]](#footnote-6) It is like that song, “Precious Lord, Take My Hand.” “Through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light. Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.”[[6]](#footnote-7) Thomas Dorsey wrote that song days after his wife Nettie died giving birth to their son. He knew that Christ lives and Christ walks with us, and there is a resurrection of the body and a life everlasting.

There is a story about a man who lived alone and was nearing death. This was in the days before cars, and the doctor arrived in his horse-drawn carriage to check on his patient. The doctor brought his dog along, leaving the dog outside on the front step as he entered the house. The doctor sat down beside the man, took his vital signs, and the told the man that the end was near. The man asked, “Doc, what is death like? What’s on the other side?” At that moment, the doctor’s dog began to whimper and scratch at the front door. The doctor said, “Do you hear that? That’s my dog. He’s never been in your house. He doesn’t know what it’s like in here. What he knows is that his master is on the other side of the door, and if his master is in here, it must be OK. Our Master is on the other side of death’s door.”[[7]](#footnote-8)

I also love our scripture today because it is obvious that Jesus’ body has changed. We like to get all hung up on the questions. What will we look like in heaven? What does it mean when we say resurrection of the body? Mary Magdalene is the first to see Jesus and she doesn’t recognize him. The two disciples walking to Emmaus think Jesus is a stranger. Our resurrected body will not look like our body right now. For most of us that is a relief.

Christ’s resurrection and his promise that we will be raised, is God’s answer to the questions every human asks about death and the afterlife.[[8]](#footnote-9) I believe that Jesus rose from the dead and has gone on to prepare a place for us. I believe that death doesn’t have the final word in our lives, and that because Jesus lives we will live also. I not only believe it, I am counting on it.[[9]](#footnote-10)

I remember when my grandfather died. He was 98 ½ and he had lived a full life. He had driven from Houston, Texas to the Arctic Circle in Alaska, all by himself. That is over 4,000 miles one way. The one thing that my grandfather did not want in his death was to be bedridden. He had watched his own father be bedridden in his last years and he did not want that for himself. I remember standing by his bedside in the hospital knowing that this is not what he wanted, knowing that he was the man who had taught me about generosity because he was always giving money to folks who wanted to go to college. He had taught me about making mashed potatoes. He said you had to beat the hell out of them. He had loved me and I had loved him. And I wanted him to be at peace in God’s loving arms. I knew that this wasn’t how he wanted to die, but I knew that I would see him again.

Sometimes the only thing that can hold us together is the words that we remember saying in the Apostles’ Creed, “I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.” It is a reminder of God’s answers to the deepest wounds, longings, and questions of our hearts. For me believing in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting helps me to face life with hope and joy. It leads me to face death with courage and it puts this earthly life and all of its worries in perspective. It helps me to grieve as one who has hope.

Did you catch it in our scripture that the women left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy? Fear and joy can be experienced at the same time and might even be inseparable. Jesus’ resurrection means that we can experience joy in the midst of fear. Resurrection creates something new. We are still going to have hardships and challenges in our lives, but Jesus’ resurrection means that we have new possibilities because Christ is with us today. The presence of God is with us when we feel fear and joy. Many of us will leave this place to go to tense dinner tables, or an uncertain employment future, or a continuation of an illness with no end in sight, or the loneliness of having endured the end of a relationship.[[10]](#footnote-11) Because of Christ’s resurrection we can experience joy in the midst of our struggles as God continues to create something new.

We are also challenged to have courage. Do not be afraid, come and see, go and tell. Here is the life and work God is giving you to do. The God who raised Jesus from the dead is not done yet. Our God is not done with our world and not done with us. Thanks be to God, Amen.

1. Hamilton, Adam. Creed: What Christians Believe and Why. Abingdon Press, 2016. P. 146. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Hamilton, Adam. Creed: What Christians Believe and Why. Abingdon Press, 2016. P. 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Hamilton, Adam. Creed: What Christians Believe and Why. Abingdon Press, 2016. P. 150. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Hamilton, Adam. Creed: What Christians Believe and Why. Abingdon Press, 2016. P. 151. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Hamilton, Adam. Creed: What Christians Believe and Why. Abingdon Press, 2016. P. 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Hamilton, Adam. Creed: What Christians Believe and Why. Abingdon Press, 2016. P. 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Story taken from Hamilton, Adam. Creed: What Christians Believe and Why. Abingdon Press, 2016. P. 158. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Hamilton, Adam. Creed: What Christians Believe and Why. Abingdon Press, 2016. P. 163. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Hamilton, Adam. Creed: What Christians Believe and Why. Abingdon Press, 2016. P. 163. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. http://www.davidlose.net/2017/04/easter-a-proclaiming-an-on-going-easter/ [↑](#footnote-ref-11)