

The holy gospel according to Matthew...**Glory to you, O Lord**

Gospel: Matthew 28:1-10

¹After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ²And 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. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. ⁵But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷Then 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.” ⁸So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

The gospel of the Lord...**Praise to you, O Christ**

**Brothers and Sisters, Grace to you and peace from
God our Father and the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

One of the things that fascinates me about the Easter story, is that the first people who see Jesus are all women. In all four gospels. I don't know if that says something or not, but that's the way it is...

Put yourselves in the shoes of these women. What a glorious day, can you imagine? Our lesson says they “left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy.” Fear and great joy! Their brains must be going a hundred miles an hour, trying to figure it out. What does it mean? Nothing like this has ever happened before! Fear and great joy! I think my brain would be exploding...

This morning I'd like to do a little reflecting on death and resurrection. In the Christian shaped life, resurrection is our hope, we claim it as our own and we live into it. So, how do we experience resurrection in our personal lives, here and now?

It's interesting to me, that this passion week has also coincided with a bad week, as far as deaths are concerned due to the virus. As I speak, around the world over a million and a half people have been infected and over a hundred thousand have died. Death is all around us, and we've been reminded of it again and again and again. Now, what does resurrection look like in the midst of all we're going through?

A bunch of stories this morning, and I'm not using any real names... In my ministry with older adults over the years, I've been fortunate to know many wise saints. I have vivid memories of many of them.

I remember Dorothy, she was well over a hundred and from the very first moment I introduced myself, she wanted to know everything about me. She wanted to know about my wife, my kids, my story... And she

listened intently. She really cared. And every time I would ask her a question, she would eventually turn it around back to me.

I went to see Dorothy often, especially if I had a bad day. She would pray for me and then bless me as I was leaving. Even though she lived close to death, she was the most life-giving person I think I've ever met!

I'm not an artist, but if I were to ever paint a picture of Dorothy, I would put a halo over her head. She was someone who radiated the love of Jesus. With her smile, with her attention, she lived a life that was loving, kind and gracious... There was always blessing, new life and resurrection when I visited her.

I remember another person named Lorraine. She was over a hundred too. Lorraine was sharp as a tack and always happy to see me. She was a little hard of hearing, so she would ask me to repeat a lot. Over the years I was there, Lorraine lost both of her kids, a son and a daughter. They both passed away within a year of each other. Lorraine was absolutely heart broken. She outlived her kids...

And even though Lorraine had every reason to be angry and bitter, she loved God more than ever. She too, was one of those people I'd paint with a halo.

One day I visited Lorraine and she had just learned she had some advancing cancer. I wasn't sure what to say, but I remember asking if she was going to have any treatments. I remember so clearly, she looked at me and said, "Are you kidding, this is my ticket to see my kids!"

Lorraine had conquered death; she was living into resurrection.

One of the things I've noticed over the years, for many spiritually mature people, it seems as though they have died in some way, before they've actually died. They've followed Jesus. They've followed in the self-emptying of their selves, only to discover death had no hold over them.

One of my personal devotionals last week used the phrase, "***They broke through in what felt like breaking down.***" We all know the phrase, what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. It's a little like that, and it is the truth.

I remember another Saint, Saint Ed... He had dealt with diabetes for almost his entire life. And I have to say, he was one of the more "wholistic" person's I've ever known. When facing a scary diagnosis, Ed had a way of keeping things in perspective. He had a "life giving" way about him. He would transform fear into faith and disease into wisdom.

And whenever I met Ed in the hospital, he was always eager to tell me what he was experiencing. And I have to say that I always felt blessed to give witness to the faith God had given him, and blessed to receive his wisdom.

After a lot of compromising health issues, I remember meeting with Ed after he made the decision to go into hospice. He talked about the dying process, he had no fear, he talked about his death being an opportunity; to be an example of faith-- to give others strength and hope. Ed, always the teacher, wanted me to know how he was going to be life giving even through his death.

I'll be brutally honest with you; I believe in resurrection because I've seen it. This is not some mumbo jumbo made up malarkey, this is real, genuine and authentic. This is the stuff Jesus is pointing us too. It's transformative, it's powerful, Jesus is always saying to us, follow me. The life of the cross is about emptying ourselves in love and service toward others, only to find ourselves being swallowed up in love, purpose and meaning...

Resurrection happens, resurrection happens here on earth, and here-after in eternity.

Now, as people walking in the darkness of this pandemic, death is all around us. Here's the important question... What kind of resurrection do you think we might experience? What good might come from this disease? How might we be transformed?

I have to confess I'm not sure. I have my ideas, and I suspect you do too. And I would love to hear them someday...

What about compassion for all the front-line workers. Just speaking for myself, every time I go into a store these days, I see the cashiers and stockers and think to myself, "these people are real heroes." I think from now on I'll have a completely different perspective about the important work they are doing. I will see them differently.

What about strengthened families! I have so much respect for young families... Young kids will be remembering this for the rest of their lives; they'll remember the time when their family stayed together and focused on each other.

And, Kris' family is spread from Seattle to Massachusetts, with cousins in Canada and Mexico, and every Thursday night for the last month, we visit with each other on that zoom computer thing! The family is closer than ever...

And don't get me started on computer skills, I trust we've all had our fair share of screen time and learning new ways to connect and include... Think of all the new things we've all learned!

What if the world community learns to work a little closer together? Through technology, God seems to be making this world a smaller place all the time. We often know what's going on in China, before we know what's going on across the street! What if, through this pandemic, we find resurrection in nations helping nations. I don't know, maybe?

Please join with me, Christ has Risen, He has risen indeed, Christ has Risen, He has risen indeed! Let's go out there and look for it. Like those women in the gospel lesson. Let's go in fear and great joy... Let's talk about it... Let's be loving kind and gracious...

Let's be the example of life conquering death. We are people of the resurrection; we make a difference in the world and for the sake of the world. And it's all God's work and our hands.

Amen... Let's sing a couple verses of Thine Is the Glory...