

## 16 04 2017 SERMON NOTES

Matthew's Resurrection narrative is quite different from the other gospels.

The resurrection appearances seem to be one day only

we don't have the walk to Emmaus which you have Mark and Luke

we don't have the appearance to Thomas which you have in John

Indeed, Matthew's gospel as we read it says Mary Magdalene and another Mary go to the tomb and the stone is not rolled away and before their very eyes as they say an angel from heaven comes down and rolls the stone away and there is a violent earthquake and Jesus is no longer in the tomb, he has gone before the stone is moved.

Jesus appears to the two women and tells them to tell the disciples to go to Galilee, no specific place. Then the chapter indeed the gospel ends with Jesus appearing to the disciples who had gathered on a hill, no upper rooms appearances

Quite possibly, this earthquake that Matthew recounts was not that extraordinary too.

After all he's the only writer to remember it. Perhaps this was just indicative of a resurrection that kind of just happened without many people at the time noticing and some didn't make a fuss anyway. John tells of the disciples going back to their fishing after the encounters with the risen Christ.

Perhaps all this talk of an earthquake and an angel and the clunky narrative about guards being placed at the tomb is just Matthew writing in a convenient explanation as to why the Romans and Jews keep dismissing the early Christians talk about a resurrection by saying that they had stolen the body. Or, if you watch the Discovery or History Channel, every so often they repeat theories about how Jesus might have "come back from the dead." Some say Jesus was drugged, feigned death, and later escaped from the tomb. Others say the disciples just got so worked up in their grief that they made up the whole thing.

So, that "story that we have to get down right" in order to "believe the right things," isn't so simple after all, is it?

The gospels surely don't help us. They each tell the story in different ways. Which one am I supposed to believe, preacher?

So, we also have a story in Matthew only about guards who witnessed the stone rolling away, trembling then going back to tell their employers that tomb is empty. You would have thought they would have been given a good telling off, but we read that they were paid to say that the disciples came and had stolen the body.

What if Matthew, with all this talk about guards at the gate, is trying to communicate to us the idea that it's not *what* you believe, it's *how* you believe?

The guards at the tomb witnessed everything the women did! They surely "believed the right things." They were right there so scared they couldn't move! They got the information, because they took it back to the authorities. The difference was "how they believed." They were content to be paid off to change their story. They sold out while the women shared the good news.

Will Willimon points out. "There are so many ways to "explain" the resurrection. The point is, we can't explain the resurrection. The resurrection explains us!"

Throughout Holy Week, the stories are told about how Jesus was "there for us," but how his disciples failed to be "there for him." They deserted, they shrunk away in fear. They lied about their association with him. They betrayed him. Now an angel who "has the appearance of lightning" is telling us this man is back. But notice what Jesus tells the women. "Greetings! Tell my brothers to meet me in Galilee." *My brothers!* The two most important words of this story. *My brothers.*

The women become not only missionaries of the resurrection message, but also agents of reconciliation. Resurrection faith isn't just a matter of believing that a dead body came back to life. The soldiers and the priests believed this as well, and were quick to work against the resurrection. Resurrection faith is knowing that this event creates a relationship between you and God. It is the understanding that you are a "brother" or "sister" being summoned to go and share the good news with others. Matthew tells us that it's not about "believing." It's about *what you do with that belief* that identifies you as a child of the Resurrection.

When the Resurrection compels us to be agents of reconciliation, that's letting Easter shape "how" and not just "what" we believe. Easter means you have another chance to be the person God created you to be, and you can start doing that at any moment, even after you think it's too late. The disciples whom Jesus called "brothers" and "sisters" learned that it was never too late. This is "how" we believe. We believe in the resurrection by believing in the possibilities for redemption and reconciliation that happen every day. We believe in the resurrection by making those moments happen.

But, if you think being a child of the resurrection means you have everything figured out, then think again. When the disciples meet Jesus on the mountain in Galilee, Matthew tells us "but some doubted." That's okay. The resurrection is big enough to handle our doubt. ". Whatever the nature of the resurrection event, it did not generate perfect faith even in those who experienced it first-hand. It is not to angels or perfect believers, but to the worshiping/wavering community of disciples to whom the world mission is entrusted.

"<sup>19</sup>Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.

And I will be with you always, to the end of the age."

And what in nutshell that Jesus has commanded<sup>34</sup> And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

This is what is exciting. The resurrection hasn't ended. It is still going on in your life and in mine. We have the opportunity to participate in it by our life lived in the name of Christ. And it won't be what we believe in the resurrection that makes a difference to Christ. It will be "how" we believe that witnesses to the resurrection.