

Chris Murphy

April 9, 2023

Scripture: Matthew 28: 1-10

Sermon Title: Joyful Resurrection

Prayer...

Introduction:

Fear and Great joy. These are the emotions of the two Mary's after they see the angel and hear of Jesus' resurrection. Then they encounter Jesus themselves and as they take hold of his feet and worship him, Jesus tells them to not be afraid and to go share the good news of his resurrection with the other disciples, his brothers and sisters, and to let them know that he will see them in Galilee.

As we celebrate Easter Sunday, you may be bringing all sorts of emotions to God. You may also be feeling fear, great joy, or maybe doubt. The death and resurrection of Jesus may be perplexing to you. You may wonder if it is true or you may wonder if it is true, how might this truth shape my life and the hope and joy I bring to the world.

May I gently give you permission today to be filled with joy in the truth of the resurrection. I had a pastor friend who would sometimes say to her congregation, "I am a resurrection girl." In other words, she believed in the resurrection of Jesus. Well, I will echo her words and say it in my own way, "I am a resurrection boy." I believe in the resurrection of Jesus as well. I personally believe the resurrection of Jesus is a true story in that the person Jesus, who I believe is the Son of God, actually died on a cross and actually rose from the dead.

For my faith, the resurrection of Jesus is also helpful in framing my understanding of the journey of life. I believe the purpose of our journey in life as humans is to grow in love. We are to grow in our love of God, our experience of God's love for us, our love of ourselves, and ultimately our sacrificial love for others.

The resurrection of Jesus is a sign that God's love is more powerful than what many humans fear most. God's love triumphs over death. Love wins. Eternal life is real and Jesus has shown us the way to life eternal

and that is the way of sacrificial love. We see this love every day in a person befriending a stranger, in efforts to care for the most vulnerable. We see it in relationships that struggle through times of loss and pain but stay faithful.

The hope and joy of the resurrection is that love wins and everything in life is deeply sacred to God, even the journey of our suffering.

In a recent article entitled *Bearing Witness: The Women of Easter*, that you can find on the website *Religion for Her*, our church's very own Rev. Dr. Melissa Ramos, Old Testament Professor for Portland Seminary and ordained Presbyterian Church USA minister, reminds us that women were present with Jesus in his suffering at the cross. She writes...

"During Holy Week, we remember and offer thanks for the incarnational love of God that embraced both the joy and the suffering of living. Who bore witness in the body of the Son of God to human suffering and pain. And we also remember and offer thanks to the

women who offered themselves and their service, bearing witness with their full selves.

While holding no formal liturgical role, these women offered to Jesus and to each other one of the most powerful forms of love and service: bearing witness. And it seems that women often are those called to this special form of ministry, the service of accompanying others through their suffering.

When we endure suffering, to have someone truly see, and to remain with us in the midst of it, is a powerful gift. To hold our gaze steadfast and not look away from suffering takes grit and love. And while bearing witness does not remove the suffering, it does perhaps ease the worst of it when others stand by to shoulder it with us.

For those who find Good Friday especially painful to contemplate, it is a comfort to know that Jesus was not alone in his hours of suffering. The women were there to bear it with him, just as they were during Jesus's earthly life. And perhaps it is part of the wonder and the joy of Easter to

know that we are not alone in our own suffering. That God truly sees, remains with us, and does not look away. And I find it no surprise that women were called to the special service of remaining with God's son during his time of suffering, to bear witness with their physical presence.

Who are the women who have borne witness to your life and shouldered your suffering with you? Perhaps this week we can offer thanks for them also."

As Melissa writes in her thoughtful article, women were with Jesus bearing witness to his suffering. Maybe as a way to honor these same women who stayed by his side in his pain, Jesus also reveals himself first to two women. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. Mary Magdalene is one of Jesus' closest friends and disciples who was healed by Jesus when he cast out seven demons from her. Modern scholars sometimes suggest that Mary struggled with mental health problems and found

healing from her mental anguish through Jesus. Legend says that Mary eventually became great among the Apostles, someone who rivaled Peter as one of the most influential leaders of the early church after Jesus' resurrection and ascension.

The other Mary, according to Matthew was the mother of James and Joseph and some believe that she could be the wife of Clopas who accompanied him on the Road to Emmaus. She also was with Jesus at his death and burial.

Not only do women accompany Jesus at his suffering on the cross and burial, but they are the first to meet him after the resurrection and bear witness of him to the other disciples. They are the great evangelists for the Gospel sharing in Christ's suffering and sharing in the joy of his resurrection.

As we celebrate with these two Mary's in our story today, I wonder how you are approaching the empty tomb. Maybe you come initially with

tears in your eyes. You come with grief in your heart for the pain you feel in your own life or what you are witnessing in the world.

The resurrected Jesus who suffered and died for you offers you comfort. Jesus wants to be gentle with you this Easter.

Maybe for others today, it is easier to embrace the joy of Easter. The hope of life eternal and the new life offered to Jesus is bringing you hope. You feel you are in a good season and the future is bright.

Whether you are in grief or in a more naturally joyful season, Jesus meets you where you are and offers you himself.

In the end that is the beauty of the resurrection of Jesus. He offers himself to these two women who had offered themselves to Jesus as his friends in his deepest time of his need.

Jesus offers himself to us in our need and invites us gently to hear the joyful news that love is the final answer to our deepest questions.

Eternal life is the gift offered to each of us. And this eternal life begins today as we put our hope and joy in a truth that some may naturally

question. How can one rise from the dead? Oh, but let us listen to the testimony of the two Mary's. They saw his pain and witnessed his resurrection power. They invite us to live in the fullness of joy through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus reminds us we are never alone on the journey of life. Jesus is risen. He is risen indeed. Let us say it once again. He is risen. He is risen indeed.

One final personal resurrection story, I want to remind us of this Easter. Last year on Easter Sunday, I shared in this sanctuary that God had put it on my heart to see if the back part of our church campus might become a Prayer Garden. For a couple years, our beloved Alan Kolb, had mowed the lawn and cleaned up the debris of the back campus in hopes that something good might develop there. When Alan's health declined, we hoped God would show us what to do with this property. Well, after I mentioned the dream God put on my heart about the garden last Easter Sunday, a new attender of our church at the time,



Ciaran Hynes spoke to me after worship on that Easter and said he would like to create a garden for us.

One year later, if you walk behind our campus, you will see we have the Newberg Peace Garden. With the help of a Thriving Congregation grant from Portland Seminary, our garden is taking shape. We have created a prayer labyrinth with the help of George Fox students and Ciaran is weekly putting in new plants and developing a path for us to enjoy.

To me it is a sign of resurrection. Soon, we will also have a garden bench and other trees to honor the memory of Alan Kolb who now rests in heaven with Jesus. The joy of the resurrection is alive in our Peace Garden and it is a sign of the peace, love, and unity that we are praying for here in Newberg.

I will also share that our Newberg Peace Garden has inspired our focus during Lent on Celtic Christianity. The beauty of nature on our property is helping us more deeply connect to God's presence in nature, which is one of the key themes in Celtic Christianity. May this Spring continue to

awaken us to the beauty and love offered to us in the resurrection of Jesus. Let us continue to bring our prayers and dreams to Jesus and see how the resurrection power of Jesus is manifest in our lives and in our broader world.

AMEN and AMEN.

## Matthew 28:1-10

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