

Easter Sunday
Christ is Risen
Matthew 28:1-10

He is not here ... He is risen! Beloved ... as we gather together this morning, we celebrate the very crux of what we believe as Christians. We celebrate what is truly at the heart of our faith ... The death and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. And this is a truth that we cannot deny ... because if we do ... then we have not truly been saved ... for to deny the death and resurrection of Christ ... is to deny the fact that He conquered death ... and in conquering death ... He set all those who have been set apart by Him free from the grip of sin. I remember watching a movie called 'A case for Christ' which tells the story of journalist named Lee Strobel and his quest to disapprove the entire Christian faith ... and it all began with a series of events that led to his wife coming to faith in Jesus Christ... and his jealousy overflowed ... so at the offices of The Chicago Tribune he approaches a fellow journalist who is a known believer ... and as he rants on ... the believer challenges him saying... and please note I am paraphrasing ... He says to Lee, if you want to destroy the Christian faith you need "simply" disprove the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ ... and so this is the mission that Mr. Strobel embarks on... He travels far and wide ... interviewing scholars ... pastors ... leading atheist thinkers ... even medical doctors ... all in an attempt to disprove the death and resurrection of Jesus ... possibly even prove that Jesus never really lived ... something that not even the most foolish of atheists would argue ... but that's a discussion for another day ... after months of investigating ... and a research board covered in all that he had discovered ... can you guess what happened ... well instead of finding evidence that would disprove the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ ... He had in fact created a very strong case proving the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ ... and as he sat weeping in his wife's arms, he confessed his faith in the risen Lord Jesus Christ ... for by the grace of God his heart of stone had been turned to a heart of flesh ... a prayer his wife had prayed countless times ...

And so beloved it is with confidence this morning ... that we will look at one of the many proofs of Jesus' glorious resurrection from the dead in Matthew chapter 28 verses 1 to 10 ... and we will be doing this in two parts ... first in verses 1 to 6a ... He is not here ... then in versus 6b to 10 ... He is risen.

Matthew chapter 28 verses 1 to 6a says, "After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here;"

He is not here. The sabbath has come and gone, and it is now Sunday morning at dawn... Sunday being the first day of the week ... and as I am sure you all know ... the strong start on Sunday ... but the weak start on Monday. But that is just a side note ... And so it was on Sunday morning at dawn that Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joses came to the tomb of Jesus ... and from the other Gospels we learn that they were not alone ... the Gospel of Mark adds Salome and Luke includes Joanna ... And the purpose of the visit was to anoint Jesus' body ... part of the process to prevent rapid decomposition ... This had not been done before out of observance for the sabbath day ... which as I mention last week ran from Friday sunset till Saturday sunset ... so there had simply not been time after Jesus' body was wrapped and placed in the tomb. Now though it is true that they should have paid more attention to Jesus' repeated prediction that He would rise from death to life on the 3rd day ... we should not judge their lack of faith too harshly ... we should rather focus on their exceptional love and loyalty to the Messiah. These were all stood by at Calvary as

Jesus was crucified ... they were in Joseph's garden as He was buried... and now very early in the morning ... here they are once more ... to see to it that everything is in order and to anoint His body ... and please note that there is no mention of the 11 being anywhere close by ... And as the women make their way to the tomb, the gospel of Mark informs us that there was concern as to how they would roll the stone away ... The gospel of Matthew answers this question ... There is an earthquake as the Lord's messenger, an angel, descends ... and rolls the stone away ... and He did so not so that Christ could leave the tomb ... but rather so that the women and later Peter and John could bear witness to the miraculous events that had taken place. And the angels' splendor was marvelous and radiant ... giving proof from where he had come ... And by the angels' mere presence ... the guards trembled and were overcome with fear ... one commentator says, 'So overcome with fright were they that if anyone had been present at the scene he could hardly have guessed what was shaking more ... the earth or the members of the guard.' And so the guards, the stone and the seal ... all that had been placed in front of the tomb was removed ... quoting William Hendrickson, 'By means of the resurrection of Christ from the grave, and the mighty earthquake that appropriately accompanied it, "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" not only laughed in the faces of the plotters who had requested this guard; he also smiled benignly upon all His dear children, for what He was actually saying was this: "I have accepted my Son's sacrifice as a complete ransom for the sins of all who take refuge in Him."' And as the angel turns his attention to the women ... he repeats a statement that should give all Christians comfort ... Do not be afraid ... and the reason is simple ... because he knows they are looking for Jesus ... He is acknowledging their loyalty ... even when the world despised and crucified Christ ... and in some what of a loving rebuke ... informs them that Jesus is not there ... a statement that should have caused the women to think back to many times Jesus had spoken to them about His resurrection ... but obviously did not ... so if He was not there ... Where is Jesus?

Matthew chapter 28 verses 6b to 10 says, "he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you." So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped 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."

He is risen. Now the angel could have said "He is risen, just as He said again and again and again and again"... but instead he graciously informs them of the Messiah's resurrection ... and as proof invites the women in to view the empty tomb ... and it is in the tomb that they see the linen bandages laying there and the head cloth folded and placed neatly ... giving evidence to the fact that Jesus' body had not been stolen ... for although the body was not there ... everything was left in an orderly manner ... which would not have been the case if grave robbers had been or the body had been removed ... and to make the message of Christ's resurrection even clearer ... he instructs the women to go and inform the disciples of what they had seen ... the marvelous message must be made known ... for it must be proclaimed everywhere by the disciples ... but they must first hear the amazing news ... They must learn of the astonishing truth that Christ's repeated prediction, 'I am going to rise again on the third day' has now become fact ... and not only that ... to further strengthen their faith ... Christ's promise that He would go ahead of them to Galilee ... is going to be fulfilled. In the very region where death and darkness had once ruled supreme... but where the Light of the world had performed most of His miracles, He would meet with His disciples once more ... the region of rejection ... but also acceptance ... of hardship ... but also joy ... of unbelief ... but also

faith ... must rejoice once more. And so the angel concludes by saying "Now I have told you" ... as if to say ... "Now you have heard the glad tidings ... and know what to do ... so get on it ... it is your responsibility now." And so with both fear and joy they ran from the tomb to fulfil their mission ... and yes many will question the fact that even though the angel had told them not be afraid they were still afraid ... but put yourself in their shoes ... they had just come face to face with a most marvelous angel ... and then been given the testimony of the resurrection of their Lord and Saviour ... and do not forget ... this in a time when a women's testimony counted for nothing in society ... the pressure on them must have been tremendous ... and yet they were filled with joy ... for they had witnessed the truths of what Christ had said ... He had conquered death just as He said He would ... And their present joy ... great as it was ... was going to be even greater. For as they are making their way to the disciples ... who should they encounter ... none other than their risen Saviour ... beloved, can you imagine the feeling of joy that must have filled their hearts! Not only had they heard, but now they had also seen! He really was risen! He really had conquered the grave! And they fell at His feet worshipping Him ... it must have been the most euphoric feeling for these loyal and courageous women. Before them was Jesus, not a stranger, the very Jesus who they had known so well and served for all those years ... there was no mistaking Him. And now Jesus tells them not to be afraid ... comforting them as He had done for so long ... and He repeats the message of the angel, "Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." And meet with Him they would ... affirming all He had taught them and promised them while He was with them.

Beloved, our Saviour is risen! Death has been defeated, and the grave has lost its power! And today we celebrate the reality of Jesus' rising again from the dead. And as we have learnt Scriptures there is proof for Christ's resurrection. If you look ahead in the verses to come there is a dramatic change in the disciples. They went from a group of men frightened and in hiding to strong, courageous witnesses sharing the gospel throughout the world. What else could explain this dramatic change other than the risen Christ appearing to them? And then think of the life of the apostle Paul. What changed him from being a persecutor of the church into an apostle for the church? From seeking to destroy the church, to sharing Christ crucified to both the Jew and the Gentile. It was when the risen Christ appeared to him on the road to Damascus. Or what about the empty tomb? If Christ were not raised, then where is His body? The disciples and others saw the tomb where He was buried. When the women returned, His body was not there. Angels declared that He had been raised from the dead as He had promised. And then there are the many people the risen Lord appeared to, just go look in Matthew 28:5, 9, 16-17; Mark 16:9; Luke 24:13-35; John 20:19, 24, 26-29, 21:1-14; Acts 1:6-8; 1 Corinthians 15:5-7, to name a few. Then there is the great amount of weight the apostles gave to Jesus' resurrection. As Paul writes 'Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.' And just to throw one more in, the fact that women are primary witnesses of the empty tomb in all the Gospel accounts is further evidence of their authenticity. Because women were not considered reliable witnesses in first-century Jewish

culture, so it would have been foolish for the authors to fictionally construct an account involving women in order to gain credibility. And so beloved it is with confidence we can proclaim, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

So go out into the world and do not be afraid ... tell everyone that our Saviour is risen! He has conquered death! And in Him is life and life everlasting!

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