

**Easter, 2019**  
**This Changes Everything!**  
**Matthew 28:1-20**

**He is risen!**

**Beginning May 12, we will keep the same schedule we used to keep when we were at two services and return to one service for the summer. That service will be at 10 AM. We will resume two services in August, when we anticipate another significant attendance increase. We have gotten our feet wet for the logistics of two services, and that is a good thing. So, two more weeks of two services after today, then back to one service for the summer.**

**Have you ever had a moment in your life when everything changed? It could be when you met “hiiiiiiiiimmm” or “herrrrrrrrrrr.” It could be when your first child was born. It could be when you got that job or when you read that book, but recall, if you are able, that moment when you felt, even if you did not express, “This changes everything!” For those of you who trusted Jesus in your late teenage or adult years, that is most likely number one in your heart and mind.**

**For some of you, though, your life changing moment was not a positive one at all. Perhaps it was when you lost someone that you loved deeply, or when you were betrayed or when that diagnosis came back to confirm your worst fears. The thing about life-changing moments is we seldom see them coming – they just happen. Except that they don’t just happen.**

**There is probably little doubt in your mind why you are here today and what the big deal is about Easter. Is there a more important day for those who believe that Jesus’ life and death meant anything? Today, we celebrate his resurrection! Friday night, we intended to**

**gather together to reflect on the sorrow associated with Jesus' crucifixion, but the Lord had other ideas with the weather. We understand, even so, that the entire weekend in which Jesus died for our sins and rose from the dead is to be considered as one event. So, when we talk about the crucifixion event, it includes the resurrection. When we talk about the resurrection event, it includes the crucifixion.**

**Here is the truth gleaned at the end of this Holy Week – on their own, neither Jesus' death nor his resurrection would mean much of anything. Taken together, everything changes! This morning, we celebrate Jesus' resurrection and consider the implications for us, nearly 2,000 years later. Our text is Matthew 28, all 20 verses. To begin our time in Matthew 28, I will read the first 10 verses. It is our custom to stand while Scripture is being read, so please stand for the reading of God's Word.**

**Matthew 28:1 Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. 2 And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 4 And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. 5 But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you." 8 So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."**

**Although most of my Sunday mornings find me in this wonderful space with my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, Alison and I have occasion, when we travel, to visit other churches, some of which are very much like Grace, some of which are more seeker-oriented, and some of which are liturgical. I find that Scripture is read in almost every church I attend, and the gospel is available to those who have ears to hear, as Jesus said. But, when the gospel is not preached, rarely do people hear the gospel read and say, “Oh – so becoming a Christian is not about what I do, but about what Jesus has done.” Does it happen? Sure. But it is rare. That is why guarding the truth of what is proclaimed on Sunday morning is the serious responsibility of church leadership. Thus, the meaning that I will share from Matthew 28 is according to our best understanding of God’s message to us as followers of Christ, and I do not say we in the royal sense of, “Pray for us as we preach today,” but as in the elders believe this according to our study and understanding of Scripture.**

**Early on the first Easter, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the tomb. Mark and Luke tell us that they took spices to anoint the body of Jesus, while Matthew tells us they went to see the tomb. Both were true. The different accounts of Jesus’ ministry, death, and resurrection in the gospels indicate that those who saw or knew of the events wrote from their own perspective or for theological purposes. Many skeptics of Jesus’ resurrection point to apparent discrepancies in the four Gospels as evidence of false reporting, but many others who study such things conclude that the different accounts strengthen, rather than diminish, the likelihood that the events happened with the story intact. If all the writers included identical elements in their stories, that would be cause for questioning their accounts.**

**Matthew tells us that the two Marys went to Jesus' tomb at the break of dawn on Sunday morning with the darkness of Jesus' death on their hearts. Had we been able to be here for Good Friday services, we would have contemplated the darkness that covered the land between noon and 3 PM on the day Jesus was crucified –the darkness of God's judgment of sin that Jesus bore, and the darkness of God's judgment of those who reject his Son. Even though Jesus had repeatedly told his disciples that he would rise on the third day after his crucifixion, hardly anyone expected it.**

**Both Marys were devoted followers of Jesus. How would you like to be known as “the other Mary?” Hey – she was at the absolute center of the most important events of all history! This was likely the same Mary of Matthew 27:56 and 61, who was the mother of James and Joseph. This James was likely one of the apostles – not the James of James and John, sons of Zebedee, but James the Less, or, James the Younger. Both Marys had witnessed Jesus' crucifixion and his burial, and now they had come to anoint his body with spices, if they could find a way to be allowed inside the tomb. They found the tomb open, alright, but not in the way they anticipated.**

**In the same way Matthew's account of Mary and Mary going to minister to Jesus in his death ties Good Friday with Easter, so the earthquake of Easter morning recalls the earthquake of Good Friday. The entire weekend was one event with two completely different components, as different as night and day and as different as death and life. Every other time in Matthew when an earthquake is referenced, it is associated with judgment of some sort, but, here, it indicates the completion of God's work and Jesus' victory. Matthew appears to say that this *great* earthquake is the result of the angel rolling back the tomb. Afterwards, the angel sat on the stone that had covered the tomb.**

**I wonder why the women didn't jump up and go see what was happening? Not really – there is no one who would not be terrified at seeing this angel! Ironically, the event that brings life to those who believe is the same event that caused the guards to become like dead men! There is no indication that either the guards or the women saw Jesus when he walked out of the tomb, but they all knew that something major had occurred! Although several possibilities exist for the empty tomb, the only one that makes any sense at all is the one the Gospels report – Jesus rose from the dead!**

**The angel spoke sternly to the women: “*You* – do not be afraid! I know why you are here, and you just missed him.” Okay, he probably didn't say that and I wouldn't be joking if I were on site, but imagine the joy of the women when the angel told them “He tried to tell you he would rise from the dead and he has done exactly as he promised. Come inside and see where he lay.” The women had come to see the grave, and now they saw something quite different! It is often that way with Jesus, isn't it? Then the angel said, “Go quickly to tell his disciples that he will go before them into Galilee.” This does not mean that Jesus will see his disciples *only* in Galilee, which was over 100 miles North of Jerusalem, but that there is important business to attend to in Galilee. We know that Jesus would see his disciples on that very day.**

**Mary and Mary were excited to run to tell the disciples what they had seen. While they were on their way to tell the disciples, Jesus met them. I know that there are times when you feel as though the Lord is absent just when you need him most. That is not true, but it may feel that way. It is in such moments when your trust in the Lord needs to be at its greatest, so ask God to strengthen your faith. If God always answered our prayers as we ask them, what would trusting God mean? If it is true, though, that God sometimes feels absent, is it not also true that Jesus meets us when we least expect him, just like when he appeared to the two Mary's?**

**Before we move on, it is worth thinking about a connection between Jesus' words to the women in Matthew 28 and Psalm 22:22, which is also referenced in Hebrews 2:11-12. I will not take the time to connect the dots, but feel free to do so if you would like. You will recall, perhaps, that Psalm 22 pre-shadowed the cross in the first half of the Psalm with verse 1 serving as Jesus' painful cry on the cross, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" That is an easy prophesy to connect with the cross, but here is indication that both crucifixion and resurrection were prophesied in Psalm 22.**

**In Matthew 28:11-15, we read the story of one of the ways that people would be led to believe that Jesus really didn't rise from the dead. You would think the guards who saw the angel sitting on top of the stone that he had rolled away from the opening of the tomb would believe. Instead, they went to tell what had happened and gladly began a false rumor that claimed that the disciples had come to steal the body away. This must have been a temple guard because the religious leaders were able to keep them out of trouble *and* to bribe them to spread a false story that would deny a resurrection. If there had been credible evidence against the disciples, though, a public trial would have been most advantageous for the rulers. There was no evidence, however, because Jesus had come out of the tomb alive, with only the scars in his hands and side to indicate the reality and full meaning of his death. Why was the soldiers' story believed with such little evidence? Because people will believe what they want to believe, despite the evidence.**

**We know from the other gospels that Jesus appeared to the disciples in Jerusalem, but Matthew tells us that the setting for what we call The Great Commission, occurred in Galilee, not in Jerusalem or on the Mount of Olives, as you may picture in your mind when you think about Jesus giving these instructions to his disciples. Which mountain in Galilee was the setting for this exchange, that, like the**

resurrection, changed everything? We don't know, but there is significance in the setting. Galilee was part of Israel, the same as Jerusalem, but the people of Galilee, where Jesus' grew up and ministered, were much more connected with the Gentile world than were the people of Jerusalem. It is fitting, then, that Jesus would instruct his disciples to *make* disciples of people from every nation while he was in Galilee rather than when he was in Jerusalem. To avoid confusion, though, we must acknowledge that it was on the Mount of Olives, just outside Jerusalem, where Acts 1:8 records Jesus giving an indirect commission to his disciples by informing them that after the Holy Spirit comes upon them, they will be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

Matthew says that in Galilee, his disciples worshiped him, but some doubted. There is no record of someone who saw Jesus after his resurrection doubting him, so Matthew was likely referring to those who heard about, but did not see, the resurrected Jesus. It would not be surprising, though, if one of the Eleven initially had trouble believing what was right before him. Have you ever had one of those times when you think, "I am not sure I believe what I am seeing,"? Either way, Jesus told his disciples that he spoke with all authority and that he had been made ruler over everyone and everything in heaven and on earth. Can you imagine if you were one of the Eleven disciples on that day? Three years ago, you were a tax-collector, or you were a fisherman, and now, the resurrected Christ commissions you with the most important responsibility anyone has ever been given. Since we believe that, by extension, the Great Commission applies to all believers, it carries the same weight for you as it did for Peter, James, and John and the rest of the disciples. You have been called to step forward and you have been given the most important mission in the world. Rather sobering, wouldn't you say?

How long could we spend on Matthew 28, verses 19-20? Let's see – we could talk about Christology – what it means that Jesus of

**Nazareth was the Christ who rules over all. We could think about the Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – that wouldn’t take too long. Or, Baptism, or Christian teaching, or the church’s mission. You know, I think we could spend another Sunday or two here, if we wanted to – or, another year or two. Or, another decade or two. Alas, we will just get an overview in the next few minutes, receiving our own instructions from the risen Christ, who, for the first time, gives God’s full name – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.**

**Most people who read these two verses think the primary verb is the command to “Go.” Grammatically, though, there is only one verb in this sentence, and it is the command to “make disciples.” “Go, baptize,” and “teach” are all participles that support the primary function of making disciples. In the Greek, though, there is significant emphasis on the word “Go” as well, and so the Great Commission looks like this:**

***MAKE DISCIPLES***

**GO**

**baptize**

**teach**

**This does not mean that we are to help young believers to grow spiritually above all else and then witness here and there, and if we get around to it, baptize and teach. It just means that this whole business is about making disciples, and it begins while we are intentionally going and serving as Jesus’ witnesses in our neighborhoods and in our communities and to the ends of the earth. D.A. Carson says that baptizing and teaching are not the *means* of making disciples, but they characterize what it means to *make disciples*. In other words, the NT knows nothing of an unbaptized believer who cares little about spiritual growth.**

**We know what happened to the Eleven who were the first to receive this commission. They died, fulfilling Jesus' command – almost all of them were martyred for their faith. Most of us have lived our entire Christian lives in a context that does not come down to life and death moments or decisions, but that does not make our decision to follow Jesus any less significant. To be baptized *into* the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit suggests making Jesus Lord of one's life. The Christian life, while ours by God's grace instead of good works, is, nonetheless, an all or nothing proposition. 1 Corinthians shows us how far off-track believers can be, and Galatians 5 and Romans 7 both indicate how much of a struggle with the flesh that this life in Christ is, but the call of Jesus is for full submission. Next Sunday, three adults and one child will be baptized, committing themselves fully to Jesus and to follow and obey him, no matter what the cost. They know what is at stake. Praise the Lord!**

**On this Easter Sunday, we rejoice that through Jesus' death and resurrection, we who believe have been brought into the covenant family of God. We are grateful beyond what words can express that Jesus commissioned his 11 Jewish disciples to take the gospel to the entire world. As baptized believers who are eager to be taught, may God give us passionate hearts for the life-giving work to which he has called the church. We are privileged men and women to be commissioned by Jesus to make disciples of all nations.**

**If you are here this morning and you have not had a personal encounter with the risen Lord – I don't mean that you have seen him – but if you have not taken the life-altering radical step of confessing your sins and putting your trust and only hope of salvation in Jesus, may I encourage you to not let another day go by without calling out to him? Let's pray.**