

Natalie W. Bell
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 Easter

He Is Alive!
Matthew 28:1-10

*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.**”*

All four of the Gospels in the Bible, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, tell the story of the Easter Resurrection just a little bit differently--- kind of like ***different facets on the same diamond***.

Or the way that you and your family members witnessed the same event, but you each ***saw and remember something different***, right?

Many Biblical scholars believe that the ***Gospel of Mark*** was written first, and was a ***sourcebook*** for Matthew and Luke.

It’s why the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—share so many similarities, while the Gospel of John is so different.

But even if they used Mark as a source, Matthew and Luke each have their ***own perspective*** on the life of Jesus. They were written to different audiences, with a different lens.

Matthew loves quoting the ***Old Testament*** and referring to Jesus’ Jewish lineage. Luke is very ***inclusive***, very into relationship details, which might be why his version of Christmas is the most familiar.

I usually preach from *John's Easter account*, because it is so personal—especially the encounter between the risen Lord Jesus and Mary, who assumes that Jesus is the gardener, until—he calls her by name. It's captivating.

But this year I was reading all the different accounts, and the lectionary is focused on Matthew in 2023, so I dove into his account of Jesus' resurrection.

And isn't it wonderful?

Can't you just see the drama?

The irony?

The humor?

But first, let's *set the stage*.

In Matthew 27:62, after Jesus' death, instead of his body being buried in a ditch, like others who were crucified, a wealthy follower named *Joseph of Arimathea* asks for his body. He takes Jesus, wraps him in linen, and lays him in his own tomb. Then he rolled a great stone over the door of the tomb and went away, all while Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (probably Jesus' mother) watched.

That was Friday night.

But the next day something else happens, that *only Matthew reports*.

The chief priests and Pharisees go to Pilate and say

'Remember what that imposter Jesus said—After three days I will rise again.

So command the tomb to be secured, otherwise his disciples may go and steal him and tell the people he was raised from death, and that deception would be worse than the first!'

Pilate says you have your own guard of soldiers, send them.

So they do, and the soldiers *seal the tomb and stand guard beside it*.

Then on the 3rd day, Sunday morning, after the Saturday Sabbath, those two Marys come to the tomb and they don't just find the empty tomb, they witness an *earthquake* when an angel of the Lord comes from heaven, and rolls back the stone. And then he just *sits on the stone!*

This is where I think God has *a sense of humor*,

because the angel does this incredible thing, and then just sits down, as if to say—*'Watch this!'*

He is so bright white like lightning that the guards shake,
and then become like dead men!

Talk about IRONY--the soldiers were there
to make sure Jesus' *dead body stays* in the tomb,
All while an angel **proclaims he is ALIVE!**

Just imagine being Mary—you've seen an angel,
witnessed an earthquake,
and now you stand at the entrance of the empty tomb of your friend and Lord.
Everything you thought you knew has changed!
How would YOU feel?

That's when the angel says ---

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 the dead,^[b] and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.'*

Wow.

Do not fear.

Jesus is ALIVE and you will see Him! What??

The next sentence is **key to the whole story:**

⁸ *So they left the tomb quickly with FEAR and great JOY and ran to tell his disciples.*

They left with **fear and great joy**—
and became the first to preach the resurrection! (Who says women can't preach?)

So why all the Fear and great joy?

Well, when was the last time you felt **BOTH fear and great joy?**

Have you ever **fallen in love?**

Remember the fear of doing and saying just the right thing,
and the great joy of being head over heels?

What about the **birth of a new baby?**

The fear of taking care of a new little human being, and the great joy of it all.

Or a new job? Or a big move?

I know I was scared to death to travel to Matawan NJ from Tulsa Oklahoma two years ago, to meet a bunch of strangers and discern whether this church felt like home!

What about *caring for a loved one* who's health is declining?
Fear of losing them, but the joy of having another day with them.

What about the *fear of what's happening in our community, country, or world?*
And the great joy of being in a place with such freedom and so many blessings.

Or the fear of what's *happening overall in churches?*
The fear of what the future holds, of what needs to change,
and the joy of just being part of a family of faith.

It seems like we are *often in a situation*
of ***BOTH fear and great joy!***

And what does *joy in the midst of fear do for us?*
For these women, *it becomes their COURAGE and strength*—
the courage to go and proclaim the resurrection!
It is the courage to tell the rest of disciples something unbelievable!
It is the courage to *keep on going*, after having lost their Lord on the cross,
and his body from an empty tomb—while *believing* in his resurrection!

As they go on their way to share what they have seen,
Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!"
And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him.
(In other words, Jesus is a *real person*, not a ghost.
We believe in the bodily resurrection)

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."*

Isn't it interesting that the first thing Jesus says to them is ***Do not be afraid.***
I wonder if this is less of a command and more like a gentle,
Don't be afraid, it's ok. It's me. I am alive!
Just go and tell my brothers and sisters to go to Galilee, there they will see me.

Have you seen the series on Amazon Prime and YouTube,
called ***The Chosen?***

It's an amazing portrayal of the life of Jesus,
with relatable characters and compelling stories, from scripture,
but ***expanded*** to give it even more context and meaning.

I love that the actor who portrays Jesus is ***Jonathan Roumie***, a devout Catholic.
He has spoken about the humbling task of portraying Jesus,
and how people on the street often recognize him
and actually ***approach HIM*** for prayer and encouragement!

Tish Harrison Warren, *He's Not Jesus, But He Plays Him on TV*, nytimes.com, April 2, 2023.

What if people do that, because they LONG to see Jesus?

Alive and walking around?

Don't we?

Don't you think we are all ***hungry for the courage and hope*** that Jesus offers?

Not just in Bible stories, but in our lives, today?

And isn't it interesting that the resurrection ***doesn't take away all fear?***

Instead, it gives ***courage in the midst of fear.***

The resurrection gives ***faith and joy***—in the middle of their fear.

They are ***empowered*** to preach, and share the Good News—that Jesus is Alive.

What if the words of the angel and the risen Jesus,
are God's Word for ***US today?***

Do Not be Afraid, I know you are looking for me, I am ALIVE.

I am here WITH you.

What if ***THAT is our Easter message?***

What if we can find COURAGE in the fact that

Jesus is Alive, and He is with us—right now!

How could that help YOU, in your daily life?

Could you use some courage and strength *to* face the fears in your life?

I know I could.

Do you need to know that you ***can have great JOY, even in the midst of fear?***

Have you ever seen the sign that says:

Be kind. Everyone is fighting a battle you know nothing about.

Isn't that true?

Everyone is facing something—if not today, then soon!

We come here on Easter, [dressed in our best],
 Surrounded by church family, loved ones, and friends.
 We come looking happy, excited, and put together.
 But inside, we might be facing things we don't even want to speak of!

So you know what? The resurrection of Jesus *is for US*.

The REAL us.

Jesus' resurrection is not just a *wild event in history* that changed everything.

It is not just a *fairy tale*.

It is not just a *fact*.

It is *a God-story*, with power and meaning for us, today!

Jesus lives, so we can live too.

He is alive, so we can have *new and everlasting life*.

He defeated sin and death on the cross,

and revealed that victory in his resurrection.

As Christians, *Easter is everything*.

We are *Easter people*.

N.T. Wright, in his book *Surprised by Hope*,

says that we should celebrate Easter *more than just one day!*

Because without Easter, there is no New Testament, no church, no Christian faith,
 and as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 today,

Without Jesus' resurrection, our *faith is futile*.

N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, HarperCollins: NY, 2008, pg. 257.

The resurrection of Jesus is the *ultimate message of HOPE*.

Because the cross, his unjust arrest, torture and death,
 was *NOT THE END of the story*.

The cross says he is with us—in our suffering.

He is with us—in our pain.

But, our *pain and suffering*—is *not the end of OUR story, either*.

All throughout Lent we've studied the *Sabbath*—
 taking time off from work.

But also time away from technology,

And from *stress and worry--to just rest*.

To *delight* in God and one another.

To *surrender* our cares.

To explore the *freedom* we have in Christ.

To be in *community* with other believers.

Sabbath is a reminder that *our work is NOT the end of our story, either. We are not what we do, or what we make, what we consume, or collect.*
 We are *children of God*, designed to both work, and rest.
 And Sabbath is a holy, delightful, freeing, joyful rest.
 And one day we'll have an **ETERNITY** of *joy and delight*.
 The *ultimate Sabbath*.

At the close of the *funeral for Winston Churchill*, that he planned himself, a single trumpeter stood at the *West end* of St. Paul's Abby and sounded "**Taps,**" the song for the end of the day, frequently played at military funerals. Then after a moment of stillness after the last note of that song, another trumpeter stood at the *East end* of St. Paul's, facing the rising sun, and played "**Reveille,**" the song for a new day.
 It was a statement about the *resurrection—of Jesus, and all of us*.
 David Lose, *Easter Courage*, workingpreacher.com, April 16, 2014.

You know what happened *after the empty tomb was discovered* and Jesus started appearing to all of his disciples?
 Some people doubted this whole story.
 They *doubted the hope, and the joy, of the resurrection*.

In *Mathew 28:11-15 the guards leave the empty tomb*, go into the city, and tell the chief priests what happened at the tomb. After the priests assembled with the elders they *bribed the Roman soldiers*, telling them to spread the rumor that the disciples stole Jesus' body while they were sleeping.
So the soldiers took the bribe, and spread the rumors.

But the **TRUTH** remains.
 Jesus is *Alive*.
 He was raised from death.
 And his resurrection—means *resurrection for each and every one of us, too*.

At almost every funeral I preach, I read from the *21st chapter of Revelation*. It is one of the most profound statements about the *hope we have as Christians*.

I cannot read it, or hear it,
without thinking about **every time I have been at a graveside**,
for a loved one, a friend, or a church member.

I cannot hear it without thinking of every time I have shared the sacred last
moments of someone's life here on earth, and **watched them breath their last**.

Hear those words of **hope and resurrection**:

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth
had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, the new
Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for
her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,
“See, the home^[a] of God is among mortals.*

He will dwell with them;

they will be his peoples,^[c]

and God himself will be with them and be their God;^[d]

⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more;

*mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away.”*

⁵ And the one who was seated on the throne said,

“See, I am making all things new.”

He IS making all things new.

We do have **fear** in this life.

But we also have **great joy**.

At the same time!

Until one day, when it **all becomes...JOY. Just joy.**

Friends, Jesus IS Alive.

So we can live too, **with courage and hope**, now and forever.

That is our **Good News of the Gospel** today.

And for that Easter joy, all God's people can say together, Amen.