

## **EASTER CAN REVIVE YOUR FAITH!**

### **MATTHEW 28:1-10**

### **SERMON**

Eleven years ago a group of us from this church took a life changing tour of Israel. We visited many of the sites we read about in the Bible: the Sea of Galilee, Nazareth and Bethlehem, the Dead Sea, Jerusalem as well as many other places. There's something very special about the land of Israel! As you walk or drive through Israel you really sense the presence of the Holy Spirit of God! All of us on that trip were impacted significantly; our lives were changed and our faith enriched and revived as a result of that wonderful visit. Let me encourage you if you haven't visited Israel to do so! It will truly enhance and revive your faith!

The resurrection of Jesus changed many lives 2000 years ago and has changed millions of lives since that time. One prominent theologian wrote, *"The evidence of Jesus' resurrection is so strong that nobody would question it except for two things: first, it's a very unusual event and second, if you believe it happened, you have to change the way you live"*. **Wolfhart Pannenburg**.

I want to speak this morning about this second point, that of Easter changing the way we live our lives. **Easter can revive your faith!** Please look in the middle section of your bulletin and you will see this point. You will need a pen or pencil to complete the sermon outline. **Easter can revive your faith!** Look at the Bible to discover some of the ways it can revive us:

**Vs.1** Matthew began his account of the miracle of the resurrection of Jesus by establishing the time period that the women visited the tomb, "after the Sabbath at dawn on the first day of the week". Matthew reported that two women, Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" went to look at the tomb. In their version of the resurrection, Mark and Luke indicate that other women joined Mary Magdalene and the other Mary as they went to the tomb. Let me say something briefly about the discrepancies in the four accounts.

All four of the gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John include the miracle of the resurrection of Jesus. But as we study their accounts we see that they provide different details of the miracle. Each of them has a somewhat different perspective. I find it interesting that the early church did not try to suppress the differences between the gospel writers. They left the differing versions intact because the essential message of all four was the same: women who had known Jesus visited his tomb and found it empty. An angel told them what happened, that Jesus had risen from the dead! All four gospel writers include the basic message of the resurrection of Jesus. The fact that the early church left these differing versions intact demonstrates the early church's desire for honesty in reporting and truthfulness of all accounts.

**Vs.2** Matthew makes it sound like an earthquake happened as the women approached the tomb. But several of the other gospel writers indicate that the stone had already been rolled back. Matthew tells us an angel sat on the large stone which had been rolled back, the stone which had guarded the entrance. Matthew describes the angel in vs.3.

**Vs.4** We find an interesting irony in Matthew's description of the guards. Jesus, inside the tomb is supposed to be dead but he's actually alive while the men guarding the tomb who are supposed to be alive are mortified! Appearances can be deceiving, can't they?!

Some people try to make themselves appear to be godly, devout and committed Christians when in reality their insides, their hearts are very far from God. The Lord wants us to be a people who have a solid faith, a committed belief in Jesus and whose actions and speech reflect a solid, internal faith! In other words, our inside belief, what we really believe and our

outside actions should be congruent, they should be the same! Easter, the Resurrection of Jesus can revive your faith in three ways:

**1.Easter can reduce fear in our lives.** Look in vs.5. **“But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified.”** The very first word the angel speaks to the women concerns fear; the angel seeks *to calm* their fears. Why did the angel first seek to calm their fear? The women were clearly frightened! They weren’t expecting to find anyone alive in the tomb. We all know how it feels when we’re doing something quietly and someone suddenly appears or speaks to us. It can be very startling, very disturbing! After their initial shock at the angel’s appearance, the women were afraid that Jesus’ body had been taken from the tomb. They didn’t know where it had been taken and the uncertainty left them fearful. They loved Jesus and they wanted to anoint his body with oils and perfumes.

In vs.8 Matthew reports that the women left the tomb **“with fear and great joy”**. After hearing the good news of Jesus’ resurrection and getting over their initial shock, the strong fear subsided somewhat. As they left the tomb the women experienced a mixture of fear and joy. Can someone experience both joy and fear at the same time? Let me ask those of you who are married? Do you recall your wedding day and how you felt? Didn’t you have a mixture of both fear and joy? I did!

We observe in vs.10 that after the women saw Jesus he told them, **“do not to be afraid”**. He told them to go and tell the disciples what happened. The fear Jesus alludes to seems to be the fear of reporting their amazing discovery to the disciples. The women could have been afraid of the disciple’s response.

Are you afraid of something today? You might be afraid of a family issue that troubles you. Or, a loved one might have a health problem that causes you to be fearful. You might be a teenager or a college student and you’re afraid for your future; what you will do when you get out of school? You might be a single person who’s afraid of your ex-spouse or of someone else in your life.

You might be afraid of our church’s future in this time of transition. What will the new Pastor be like? Will he fit into our church? Will you like him?

Peter, one of Jesus’ key disciples knew all about fear. When questioned, Peter denied that he even knew Jesus on three separate occasions. Peter feared for his life! But after the resurrection and Pentecost Peter became a much different person.

Listen to what he wrote in his first letter about Jesus and the resurrection, **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:3-4)**

The miracle of the resurrection and Pentecost transformed Peter’s life! It reduced his fear! He changed from being a cowardly, timid, fearful man who denied Christ three times into a bold, courageous leader of the early church. Peter’s faith was so empowered that he preached to thousands, served as the leader of the early church in Jerusalem and church tradition holds that Peter made his way to Rome where he was eventually crucified for his faith. He didn’t feel worthy of being crucified in the same manner as his Lord so He was crucified upside down. Wow! Talk about transformation!

God can transform you too! When you commit your fears to the Lord, the power of the resurrected Lord can take your fears and change them. The Lord can instill in your heart a new

courage and fortitude, a spiritual strength to tackle the fears and challenges in your life. So, commit your fears to the Lord this morning. The Lord can handle any fear you experience! The Easter message can do something else for us:

## **2. Easter can inspire great joy in us!**

Of the four gospel writers, Matthew stresses joy the most in the Easter account. As we have seen, Matthew mentions joy in **vs.8**. He reports that the women left the tomb, “**with fear and great joy**”. The women were greatly joyful for Jesus’ resurrection! It’s interesting that the only other time Matthew mentions great joy is when the magi in the birth narrative of Jesus saw the star over Bethlehem where Jesus lay as a babe. Matthew reports that, “**when they saw the star they were overjoyed**”. **(2:10)** I find it interesting that great joy occurs both at Jesus’ birth, at the beginning of his life on earth and his resurrection, as he returned to life on earth. Here’s the connection: Jesus’ life and resurrection stimulates great joy!! His life in you today can stimulate great joy!

In previous messages I’ve made a distinction between joy and happiness. Happiness is a fleeting good feeling based on circumstances. You win the lottery and you’re happy! But joy has much more depth to it. Joy’s a deep-seated feeling and attitude that has substance and meaning. One can experience joy in spite of difficult and even harsh circumstances in life.

In Matt 28 **vs.9** we again read of joy. The word Jesus used for “Greetings” means “rejoice!” It’s the exact same word in the original text that the apostle Paul used for “rejoice” in Philippians 4:4 where he wrote, “**Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!**”

Tony Campolo shared this story about himself in his book, **Stories That Feed Your Soul**. “*I was in an elevator in the Hyatt Hotel in Chicago, Illinois. A fellow passenger was a teenager who looked to be about 15 or 16 years of age. “How are you doing?” I asked, trying to be friendly. His voice was grumpy as he replied, “All right”. “You having a good day?” I asked him. “Yeah” he mumbled. There was no joy in this young man. When we got to the ground floor, the elevator doors did not open. I panicked and began banging on the doors, shouting, “These doors won’t open! Will somebody get these doors open? I need to get out of here!” Then, I heard a voice behind me say calmly, “Sir, the door is open”. As I turned, I realized that this was one of those elevators that had doors on two sides and I was banging on the wrong doors. What amazed me was that my fellow passenger didn’t laugh. As he started off the elevator, I took hold of his arm, pulled him back and said, “Hey, kid, laugh! This is funny!” He couldn’t wait to get away from me. Now, if you are asking me what this has to do with Christianity, let me ask you something: Did you laugh out loud, or at least chuckle on the inside when you read about my most embarrassing elevator moment? Unlike the often joyless world we live in there is often a joyful hilarity that permeates those who are infused with the Holy Spirit and who know the joy of the Lord”.*

The Resurrection of Jesus can give you this joy! Jesus’ rising from the grave inspired great joy in many people. The truth that Jesus conquered death for all who believe in him should fill us with great joy! I hope the resurrection of Jesus has touched and filled your life with joy!! Please note a third way Easter can make a difference in our lives:

## **3. Easter can stimulate faith or revival of our faith!**

On the first Easter, the disciples desperately needed revival of their faith in Jesus! Remember, these disciples, these men had abandoned Jesus and had gone into hiding. We observe men who once followed Christ passionately but somehow let their faith slip away.

The resurrection account includes indications that God wanted revival among the disciples. God sent the women *to the disciples* to tell them about Jesus' rising from the grave. Look again in the text in vs.10b, **“go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; and there they will see me”**.

Remember, these disciples, these men were in hiding. They had completely abandoned Jesus! They were afraid for their lives! God could have sent the women to the many people that Jesus had healed in his ministry, people that could have given compelling testimony to the power of God they experienced through Jesus. Or, God could have sent the women to Nicodemus or Joseph of Arimathea or other sympathetic religious leaders in Israel. But God commanded the women to go to the very men who had abandoned Jesus, the disciples who feared for their lives, men hiding from the authorities, men who seemed weak spiritually.

Note something interesting about the word, “go”. Matthew used the word, “go” twice in vs.10 in referring to Jesus' instructions to the women. “Then Jesus said to them, **“Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee and there they will see me”**”. Jesus instructed the women at the tomb to go and tell his disciples about his Resurrection. Later, Jesus met with his disciples on an unnamed mountain in Galilee and told them, **“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”**.

God wanted revival among Jesus' disciples! God wanted these spiritually weak men to return to following Jesus, to lay aside their fears and apprehension, to be emboldened by the truth of the resurrection! These disciples would be key players in the kingdom of heaven. They were needed for spreading the message of the gospel of the kingdom! Ten of the disciples would be martyred for their faith but before that happened; they took the message of Christ to Africa and Asia and Europe. God truly revived their weak faith. The key indicator of this is: ***They answered Jesus' call to go!***

Do you need revival of your faith today? Perhaps you can identify with the disciples before they saw the resurrected Lord. Like them, you feel that your faith has been weak, ineffective and almost non-existent. ***Good news! God hasn't abandoned you! Listen: God never leaves His people!! Let the resurrection of Jesus stimulate revival of your faith just as it did for the disciples!*** To experience revival of your faith, simply humble yourself before God, confess your waywardness and sin to God and ask for the strength to change. When we truly humble ourselves before God and seek him with sincere and contrite hearts, God hears our prayers and answers them. God will revive your faith!! And then be sure and go! Like the women who sought the disciples and the disciples who were commanded by the Lord to go, so are we! The Lord wants you and me to go and make disciples! Set aside your fear and apprehension, your reluctance and lack of courage. Go and tell your friends, your neighbors, your classmates, your work associates what God has done in Jesus Christ!

As I close this morning I invite you to take a moment and humble yourself before God and bow your head. As you bow your head, you might be sensing a need for revival of your faith in your heart. Perhaps God's spoken to you about returning to the faith you once had. Ask the Lord to revive your faith, to renew you!! Or, a particular fear might be overwhelming you this morning. Commit that particular fear to the Lord and trust him to take it. Or you might be lacking joy in your life. I'll give you a few moments to commune with God in silent prayer and then I will lead us in a corporate prayer. Let us pray.