

Go, Tell It!

April 24, 2011 Easter

Scripture: Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

118:1 O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever!

Let Israel say, "His steadfast love endures forever."

The LORD is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation.

There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous: "The right hand of the LORD does valiantly; the right hand of the LORD is exalted; the right hand of the LORD does valiantly."

I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the LORD.

The LORD has punished me severely, but he did not give me over to death.

Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD.

This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it.

I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.

The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

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. 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. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.

For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men.

But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified.

He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.

Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you."

So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of 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."

Proclamation of the Word

Welcome to the first day of the new week. Welcome to the new creation. The first day has dawned and Jesus is raised from the dead. Alleluia!

According to the gospel of John, Jesus confronts the merchants and the money changers in the Temple made of stone and mortar.¹ He says, "destroy this Temple and in three days I will rebuild it." They did not understand Jesus. They say it took 46 years to build this temple. This is impossible, Jesus. But they could not understand or see what Jesus was talking about. He is talking about resurrection that is real. Resurrection of the BODY, the Spirit of God set loose on the world, shaking the very foundations of the earth. When Jesus speaks of the resurrection he is talking about a cosmic change, a difference. An angel or messenger sits upon a rock like it were a throne announcing that God has conquered death.

But when Jesus says he will destroy this Temple, he was talking about being killed. You cannot confront the powers of death without paying for it. What is death? Death is a power that corrupts and harms. Death is greed and selfishness. And it will kill Jesus.

Death of the divine and goodness on a cross breaks the heart of any of us. We weep to see something so pure, so loving, so true put to death by corrupt powers. How awful. On Thursday some of us experienced the Last Supper. The worst part was hearing the hammer hitting that wood of the cross over and over and over. It was grating. It made me sad, beyond sad, to despair. It made me realize how they must have felt when Jesus died. They must have believe that all was lost and that death had the final word.

Despair can take over. Sometimes it seems like the light of the world is being extinguished. We look around and see destruction from earthquakes and violence. We look at Libya and see the sad paradox of missiles fired at playgrounds and ambulances with machine guns attached to the roof. Despair. It is easy to fall into that trap and stay there, to think that despair is a reasonable response.

Jesus enters into our despair and confronts it. He shows us the way through it. He says I will rebuild the temple in three days. My execution will not be the end. God is everywhere present and alive. Greed, violence, corruption, and abuse are wrong. They cannot last. They are the powers of death, and they will be defeated. Resurrection follows death and life begins again.

But he is not here, the angel says. He is not held by the powers of death. He is freedom and life itself. He is risen! He is risen indeed. He is raised in body, we know, because the women latch on to his feet and do not want to let go! He is real and the real things of this world matter. It makes all the difference in the world to believe in an embodied God who enters into the world and not some vacuous, spirit-ish god, nor an impersonal energy. God suffered in every way in body, mind and spirit, only to be raised to life again. This is resurrection.

This world matters. It is worth redeeming, restoring, and renewing. You are worth redeeming, restoring, renewing. Every act of compassion matters. Every work of art that celebrates what is good and true matters. Every fair and honest business and trade practice matters. Everything you do matters. The whole world that Jesus comes to save and redeem matters. Resurrection makes all the difference.

Matthew's gospel gives us an important detail, for when Jesus dies the whole earth shakes with the earthquake. Jesus' death shakes the foundations. It makes a difference. Just as a star in the East announced his birth, and the sky goes black at his death...all of creation is changed because it all matters to God. **We** all matter to God. **They** all matter to God.

Then God rocks the world and rolls the stone away to announce, He has been raised. He is not here.

Even Romans are shaken- scripture reads that they are like dead men- made powerless over the Life-giving God. The Romans represent death and the power of Empire.

An angel sits victorious upon the stone and delivers a message. The message is not fancy. It is clear, simple, telling what you have seen and what God is doing. The angel is matter-of-fact.

As one man reflects, "One might have wished for something a bit more grand, something that could be memorized and recited on special occasions by children. Something with rolling cadences, like the Declaration of Independence or the Gettysburg Address. Something that Bach or Handel could have set to music.

Something more akin to "Fear not, for I bring you tidings of great joy which shall be to all people" Well, you get the picture. It does have a neon angel in it. But it lacks "alleluias" and "forsooths." Not even a single "Hail, Mary." Just the facts, ladies: Jesus is risen, as he promised. See for yourselves, the body is not here. Tell the disciples that if they go to Galilee, they will see him. He goes on ahead of you."²

Not only was Jesus executed, but his community of friends was scattered and hiding out in fear. They are shaken too. But the community will be re-membered, put back together, reunited. The women have an important message to pass on. Go, tell my brothers, Jesus says.

Even though their feet are filled with fear, their "great joy" lends them wings. They run, not saunter or walk. The One that has saved them has a message to send out to those who are afraid and think that God has given up on them.

Jesus is alive! He's not dead. We do not have to be afraid for love conquers hate and life follows death. Resurrection makes all the difference. And followers of the Resurrected Jesus have good news to share with those along the way. The temple was destroyed and rebuilt in Jesus.

We have brothers and sisters who are scattered and sitting in fear needing to hear good news.

Jesus has a message to tell, and he asks us to take it to them.

But is the resurrection community, the church of Jesus Christ, made real in Fort Hill Church making a difference? Are we telling the world that Jesus is risen?

I was inspired by a story that made the news. A woman from Minneapolis, a stay at home mom, wanted to teach her children something about community service and making a difference. They created a community art project. It was sort of like the Philadelphia Opera flash mob singing the Hallelujah Chorus in a downtown shopping mall at Christmas. The video has been a *youtube* internet craze showing this planned, yet spontaneous act of public art. By the way, we will go out singing today. You have been provided a copy of Handel's Messiah and the Hallelujah chorus so you can be part of a resurrection flash mob. Just follow Maestro Margaret.

The mother wanted to show her kids that they could do something that made a difference. So this mom and her kids picked a tree in a public park. They took brightly colored pieces of paper and asked people to write their wishes, hopes and dreams on them. People would walk by, write down their wishes and the result was a beautiful tree full of prayers. People stopped their running, walking and biking to read the heartfelt words of strangers -- and add their own. Some wishes were universal: world peace, a cure for cancer, "someone to love." Others were intensely personal: "Sobriety for my Mom." And some were childlike and whimsical: "I wish I had a rainbow pony." The mother, Deb, said some were very moving, like the one that read "I wish my nephew would never be bullied again."³ Pictures of the "wishing tree" reminded me of Easter egg trees that some folks put in their yards this time of year.

So that gave me an idea, if we are like the Marys who have come to the tomb to see a stone rolled away and have been sent ahead to tell the others the Jesus has been raised from the dead, maybe we should be creating something outside these walls to take the message of the resurrection out into the world. We have a message to go and tell. I am not proposing that we destroy this temple, this building, but that we set loose the resurrection message into a world dealing with despair and death. I think we need not a "wishing tree" but a

“resurrection tree” that tells the good news of the gospel, God’s saving love has conquered death. Jesus will not let the women hold onto him, but sends them forth to go and tell it!

So, I ask you, where have you seen God at work, making a difference in this world?

Where have you seen new life and want to give thanks?

Who or what do you wish to pray for that desperately needs new life and God’s grace?

And I invite you to write down those messages. Take a minute to pass along the paper and grab a pen. We are a sharing community so you can share!

Listen to those questions again and respond on the pieces of paper. (REPEAT questions)

After worship today and the singing of the Hallelujah chorus we will hang these messages outside on the two trees out front. You can hang your own or place them in a basket to be hanged. For three days or so we will proclaim and witness to our Risen Lord to all who pass by, and believe me, lots of folks walk up and down this sidewalk every day. We will tell the world here in Clemson, SC that the wooden cross has been overcome, and new life will be seen in a living tree.

We are a resurrection people, formed by the grace of God’s redeeming love, and folks, we have been entrusted with a message.

We will not be afraid to share it.

We will witness to the God of all creation who overcomes death with new life.

If you came here to hear good news today, you just did! (a la Jim Richardson)

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¹ John 2:18-21

¹⁸The Jews then said to Him, "What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?" ¹⁹Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" ²¹But He was speaking of the temple of His body.

² John C. Purdy, *God with a Human Face*, in <http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=435&C=323>

³ See news article ^{at} <http://www.startribune.com/lifestyle/105057174.html?page=1&c=y>. Idea from David Lose, www.workingpreacher.org