

Easter Sunday Sermon, April 12, 2020

Happy Easter! I'm Pastor Doug and thank you for joining us for our virtual Easter Service. It's strange to be celebrating separately but though we may not be together as a faith family, people around the world are worshipping the risen Savior today! And now to begin our time in God's Word, the Hale kids are going to be reading our passage from Matthew 28:1-10. Listen and read along with them. [Hale video here.]

Would you please pray with me? God of Life, we thank you for the powerful truth this passage points to – that Jesus is ALIVE! May the truth and the power of this beautiful truth really sink into us today. Let your Word speak and give us ears to hear it. In the name of our risen Savior, Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Have you ever been in a really thick fog? I mean the kind of fog that was so heavy and dense that you had a difficult time seeing even twenty or thirty feet in front of you. Driving or hiking in that kind of fog is both dangerous and disorienting. Flying or boating in it can be downright disastrous, all because in that fog we lose our sight.

Over the last few weeks, I have talked to a lot of different people in our community, both inside and outside of our faith family. The stories that I am hearing regarding this pandemic are difficult ones. It's as if we are all shrouded in a deep fog together right now.

- High school seniors wondering whether they will have a graduation.
- Caregivers forced to leave while their parents are escorted to the ER by strangers.
- Teachers struggling to educate apathetic students.
- Loved ones dying without family present to comfort them.
- Business owners forced to furlough workers because they can no longer make payroll.
- Families quarantined in separate homes because of the risk of exposure.

With the circumstances I just described, we can lose hope. In the fog of our current health crisis, we see numbers rise on confirmed COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths. In the fog of our current economic crisis, we see numbers rise on unemployment, bankruptcy, and debt spending. In the fog of our current social crisis, we see numbers rise on feelings of loneliness, disconnectedness, and depression. The hope of a bright future seem shrouded in a deepening fog. When everything is not as we expected, life feels hopeless.

Where do we turn when we feel this hopelessness?

In Matthew 28:1-10, we read the story of the Resurrection of Jesus and the story of two of the women who experienced what happened next. In these verses, we see that **because God**

does the impossible we must let him redefine our hope. Today we will be looking at the ways this passage points us to hope. We need it right now.

Did you notice what was going on with the two Mary's as they went to the tomb? It was early morning—before dawn. The earthquake had already happened. The angel had already rolled the stone from the entrance to the grave. The guards had already left their post and were giving their report to the religious leaders. And now these women approached.

Why were they there? Why did they go to the tomb? Matthew says that “they went to SEE the tomb”. They had observed Jesus' journey to the cross. They had watched Jesus die. They had experienced his body being prepared for burial. They had seen his corpse placed in the tomb. So again, why were they there? They were there for the same reason any one of us visits a grave, they were there to pay their respects. In a couple other Gospel accounts, it says that they brought spices for Jesus' body.

Again, they were there to pay their respects to a dead person. They were expecting a dead body. They were expecting an occupied tomb. They were there to mourn a loss. This was what they expected when they went to the tomb.

That is the reason this angel was there. He looked like lightning and his clothes were white as snow. Why did he look that way? He had come directly from God's presence to give these women what they needed and it is what we need, too! The angel did not open up the tomb so Jesus could get out, he was already long gone. Instead, the angel rolled away the stone so they could get in and see. And that's what he says to them: “COME AND SEE!” These words seemed to cut right through the fog of their difficult circumstances and let in the light of truth.

Matthew 28:5-6 says this: *But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.*

You see, Jesus redefines our hope by showing us the truth. The solid, foundational, unmovable, unchangeable, undeniable truth is that the tomb was empty. They could see it themselves. And the only explanation we are left with was that Jesus was no longer dead.

Look where their expectations led these two women: To a tomb. That's where our expectations lead, too. Mary and Mary had not even considered resurrection in the equation. They thought it was all over. When our expectations are shattered, sometimes so do we. But that's where hope is restored and redefined, in what God has already accomplished for us and prepared for us. That's our hope. But in order to restore the hope in us, he has got to break us out of our pseudo hope, our fake hope. What is that fake hope? It is our human expectations that don't always tell us the truth because it is based on our circumstances. But

our when our hope is based in the truth—truth of an empty tomb, and a RISEN Savior. Now THAT is hope. Lasting hope. Hope that weathers any circumstance because it's always true.

How does this look for the caregivers among us?

The truth about Jesus' resurrection redefines my hope as a caregiver by telling me that my loved ones are safe in God's hands. Whatever the circumstance, whatever the care, wherever they are, the empty tomb means God cared enough to send his Son into the heat of our human suffering in order to conquer it. That is the truth of the gospel story. The compassion of Jesus shines through to those we love even when we cannot be with them. He is there, even when we are not. This truth is true because Jesus is alive. This is a living hope.

This Easter morning are you willing to embrace the TRUTH of the empty tomb? Are you willing to let God take shattered expectations and do something you never thought possible with them? Are you going to let him redefine your hope in a living Savior rather than a dead expectation? That is what resurrection does.

We know that because God does the impossible we must let him redefine our hope. We have seen that one of the ways he redefines our hope in the fog of our lives is by showing us the truth. What else? What else is necessary when we feel hopeless?

Matthew 28:8-10 says this: *So [the women] departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and 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, and there they will see me."*

Do not be afraid. The only way Jesus can deliver that message is if he is right there with them. You see, Jesus redefines our hope by meeting us right where we are. The women were sent on their way by the angel and told to go and tell the disciples to meet Jesus in Galilee. But notice here that on their way, Jesus met them. Why would he do this? They were already on their way to tell the disciples. In fact, earlier it said the women were *running* to tell them. He would be seeing them soon.

And why Galilee? Shouldn't Jerusalem be the place where Jesus should make his presence known? Jerusalem is central for the Jews. It is THE place to be and yet he wants to see his disciples in a far-off, unknown, often-belittled place called Galilee. Sure it's where most of them are from, but shouldn't this resurrected Christ be looking at bigger and better places?

The reality of the empty tomb means Jesus is now with us wherever we are. Do you see that? He met these women on their way. Matthew went so far as to put in Jesus greeting and the

women bowing in worship and touching his feet. This is Jesus real and alive and present with them. And soon the disciples, who by the way are at the moment of this moment with the women were sheltering in place in the upper room, would soon see Jesus, too. The real Jesus, alive and present with them.

How does the presence of Jesus look like right now for us as teachers and parents?

The truth about Jesus' resurrection redefines my hope as a teacher or parent by telling me that when I love my students and my kids well by doing the best that I can with what I have as I try to teach them at home or online. I can rest in his rest. Even my failures and faults are redeemable in the lives of my kids and my students. Because the tomb is empty, I can trust in a living Redeemer. What hope for us! What redefining hope!

How does this presence look like right now for employers?

The truth about Jesus' resurrection redefines my hope as an employer by telling me that when I love my employees well—even when I have to let them go or put them on furlough—Jesus is both my Provider and their Provider. The empty tomb reminds me that God's best and most satisfying provision is more available now than ever. So walking with my employees through the unemployment and furlough process does not have to be a guilty and shameful journey. It can be a tenderly compassionate one because it is based on a living Provider. Guess what? Jesus is a better Provider than you will ever be for them. Trust him.

Matthew 28:1-10 is a life-giving passage for us! It cuts right through the thick fog of our situation. In these words we see that **because God does the impossible we can let him redefine our hope**. This redefining hope is based entirely on Christ—our risen Savior. We need Jesus to show us the truth of the empty tomb. And that truth is powerful. We need Jesus to remind us he meets us where we are. And that reminder is comforting. And He does this, just like he did for Mary & Mary on that early morning. He did it! He is risen! He is alive! And that changes everything! Let's pray together.

Father, thank you that the tomb is empty! And because of that truth we know walking with our risen Savior makes all other concerns a shadow and all other interests a dream. Remind us that we don't just need another heart but a brand new one. Remind us that we don't just need comfort or confidence, but Christ. For all those looking for him right now, would you open their lives up to you? Would you meet them where they are with the power that raised Jesus from the dead? Thank you, God! In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.