

Easter Sunday, 2008
Good Hope Lutheran Church
Matthew 28: 1 – 10

As you no doubt would expect, my sermon text today is the Gospel lesson, from Matthew 28. In particular, we'll be looking at the women; then we'll at least glance at the angel; before pausing to behold, the Risen Lord Jesus.

May the Lord be with you all. And let us pray:

Father in heaven on this day, your Son our Savior rose from the dead, and opened to us the way of everlasting life. Give us faith to follow wherever Jesus leads in this world of time—help us to know and do your will each day! And on the *last* day, in your mercy, raise us up as well, to life in your presence. Father we lift this prayer before you, trusting now as always in the name of Jesus, AMEN.

The women, the angel, and the Lord—let's start by looking at these two women, both of them named Mary, by the way. For the record, the Gospels of Mark and Luke are explicit in saying, that when the women went to the tomb on Easter Sunday morning, they did so; with spices in hand. They expected to find a dead body, safely sealed within a tomb; their intention was to anoint that body with their various oils and spices, an act of respect for a dead friend in keeping with some very old and deeply held customs and traditions. Much to the women's surprise, in the Gospels of Mark and Luke—well, the body was gone.

Now that's Mark and Luke. Today we happen to be in the Gospel of Matthew, and the Gospel of Matthew you will notice does not mention spices. It says nothing about anointing a dead body with oil. It simply says, the women went to see the tomb, they went—to *see* it. Perhaps we assume they had oils and spices and that this is the same situation as in Mark and Luke—ok, but it doesn't happen to say that. It simply says, they went to *see* the tomb.

What did they expect to find? What did they think they would see? The pious answer would be to say that these women remembered the words of Jesus, yes, they remembered how the Lord had told them all not only of His death but also of His resurrection. They remembered these words, and they went to the tomb expecting to find it empty, they went looking for a miracle! Ok. But that's not what the angel says about them in verse 5. And that wouldn't explain their fear—if they went to the tomb expecting a great miracle, why were they so terrified when they got it?

So maybe the pious answer doesn't work. Maybe these women didn't remember a single word Jesus had said, maybe they had no idea what they were looking for, maybe they weren't really looking for anything. Maybe they were just sightseeing maybe they were just, taking the tour! "On the left, the garden where He prayed. On the right, the tomb where He lays buried," maybe they went to the tomb to see the sights, expecting nothing in particular—just another morning. And when we're done here well, we'll go home for lunch.

In other words, maybe these two women were kind of like us. Here on Easter Sunday, sight seeing. Here on Easter Sunday, not expecting anything in particular—just a nice morning, on your left the choir on your right the lilies, how pretty they all are. Then later we break for lunch, but for now—not really expecting anything in particular.

Boy were those two women named Mary in for a surprise. They weren't looking for anything, but they found something!—and He found them. Jesus, Risen from the dead. So what are you here looking for? Anything? Is church a nice habit, an occasional routine? A place to see *and be seen* a couple times a year, nothing more? What if you found something today. What if He found you. Are you ready for something more than spiritual sight seeing? Instead of just taking the tour. Are you ready to live the life? A life that belongs wholly and completely to Jesus, who died and rose again. The Good News of Easter—God in Christ is ready to give you His kind of life, now and forever. It is His gift! Real life, now and forever! May this be the day, we too receive it.

About the angel I will only say this. His clothing was white as snow. As I began thinking about this sermon a week or two ago, well, let's just say I was afraid the angel's clothing wouldn't be the only thing white as snow today. Two weeks ago was a blizzard—"I'm Dreaming of a White Easter" is really not the choir anthem I was hoping to hear.

It doesn't look like Easter out there—the snow the ice the slush. It doesn't look like Easter out there anywhere—the war, the violence; the hunger and the pain. It doesn't look at all like Easter out there, a world still stuck in death and despair, while we proclaim the Risen Lord. It doesn't look like Easter out there—and worse, it doesn't always look like Easter in here, either. Tell me:

If someone looked at your daily life and, listened to your everyday speech. If someone saw how you spent your time and treated your family and cared for neighbor in distress. If someone saw all the old sins you just have never quite been able to let go of, if someone saw all that. Could they tell it was Easter. Could they tell that the Lord Jesus was Risen from the dead, and that you believed it? Ice and slush and snow, death and grief and despair, the world doesn't look much like Easter. And neither do we, maybe. What if someone was watching? And you know He is.

No wonder the women were a little afraid. Yet the angel, clothing white as snow—the angel said to them Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid, Jesus died and rose again—to forgive you, and save you. Which brings me at last to my final comments, about the Risen Lord Himself.

See, the angel said to the women in verse 7, “Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee.” Ok, but no sooner does the angel say that, then Jesus appears to the women in verse 9—and they're not in Galilee yet! In fact they've barely left the tomb!

It's like this. We have a Savior who is both going ahead of us, AND who is prepared to meet us along the way. He IS going ahead of us, to heaven; AND He is here to meet us along the way. Now if He was ONLY going on ahead of us to heaven, well it's nice to know He's out there waiting, but what about the aches and pains of life today? What about the changes that need to be made in my life, what about my family right here, my community too; our health our hopes our problems our fears, right now? If He has ONLY gone on ahead of me, what about today?

Then again, if He was ONLY here to meet us along the way, thanks for the help Lord, I mean really, thanks for the support—but what is there to look forward to? If Jesus was only here to help with this life—what about the life of the world to come?

But we have a Savior who is both going ahead of us AND who is prepared to meet us along the way. Hope for heaven AND help on earth. Life for the dead AND change for the living. The destination AND the journey, ahead of us AND along the way, Jesus—every breath we take. Every hope we cling to. He has gone ahead of us, and is with us now—every today, every tomorrow too. A blessed Easter indeed, in the name of that same Jesus Christ our Lord, AMEN.