

Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed! Matthew's telling of the resurrection story is dramatic and wild, boiling over with supernatural events- like an earthquake! As with many stories in the Bible, upon hearing it we are filled with questions and maybe even some doubts. We tend to see what we think is possible and resist seeing what we assume is not. Matthew is a masterful storyteller, and "imagination is an essential tool for creating space for spiritual perception" (Wm. Loyd Allen, *Connections*). Yes, when it comes to Easter, imagination matters. Maybe just maybe the supernatural is possible?! What Matthew is trying to get across is that "there is merely no naturalistic way of speaking of the resurrection" (D. Cam Murchison, *FOW*). The Resurrection story- no matter which Gospel account we read- cannot be explained in human doing. This miracle is only God's doing. Before turning to God's Word for us this day, let us first pray. **PRAY. READ.**

When was the last time you were moved spiritually or emotionally?
When was the last time you were amazed?! For those of you who may not know this past Wednesday night four astronauts were launched on Artemis II to circle around the moon. This is the first moon mission since Apollo 17 in 1972. I didn't realize that it had been before I was born that NASA has had a space mission to the moon. Where have I been? Over a half a century ago, the mission was to the near side of the moon that you can see from Earth. However, this time, 50+ years later, the mission is to the far side of the moon, and they are doing it in a 10-day swing. It is a mission of deep-space firsts. Of the four astronauts, Mr. Glover will be the first Black person to journey to the moon. Ms. Koch

will be the first woman to head there. And Mr. Hansen, a Canadian, will be the first non-U. S. citizen to accomplish the feat. Just as the Apollo missions made people stop and look, they say the Artemis II crew can bring a revival of the awe, the wonder and the sublime of space exploration. But what especially caught my eye was what each astronaut hopes to do when they're moved by what they see. "When this unfolds, Mr. Hansen said he will wish that the world would also stop to take in what's still possible. Mr. Wiseman said he will be glued to the window, in wonderment of the magic trick by which Earth will leave and then return into their view. Mr. Glover said he plans to take videos and photos of his crewmates, wanting to remember their facial expressions forever [Yes, they will have their cell phones with them]. And Ms. Koch will take a moment to recognize what she can, and can't feel, while being in space. 'You don't feel things like envy,' or anger, she said, adding, 'You feel awe and you feel togetherness, and I think what you don't feel is just as important as what you do feel.' That moment will belong to the four of them" ([article](#), *New York Times*, Timothy Bella). Just as witnessing this moment of Jesus' empty tomb and then seeing the Resurrected Lord in the flesh, belonged first only to the two Marys. If they would have had their cell phones I wonder what they would have captured early that Easter morning in the graveyard? Regardless, "I have to imagine that, for these women, early on that third day, they were seeking that which could *move* them. Following days of trauma and tragedy, they longed for that which would stir their memory and stoke their affection. Like any family or friend visiting a graveside, they went to be reminded of Jesus, of this man who had reshaped their lives and their understanding of the

world” (Cynthia M. Campbell and Christine Coy Fohr, *Meeting Jesus On The Road*). It’s a powerful thing to be moved, isn’t it? We may not have the pictures to capture this moment, but I wonder if we, too, can be moved and amazed- to have our faith stirred- like these Marys- by our Resurrected Lord?

Matthew tells us that *“after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.”* Matthew doesn’t really tell us why they go. We can imagine that they go with grief. They go with love. They go, perhaps, with questions they cannot name. There is a holy curiosity in their steps- not skepticism, not certainty- but a need to see. That’s what Matthew tells us. They went to “see the tomb.” And it is there, in that movement toward the place of death, that heaven moves toward them. The illuminating angel’s first words are not explanation but comfort and then invitation: *“Do not be afraid for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here but has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.”* And then immediately: *“Go quickly and tell his disciples... he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.”* Don’t be afraid. Come and see. Go and tell. “The stone has been rolled away not to let Jesus out, but to let the witnesses in” (Judith Jones, *WP*). Yes, the guards were there to witness along with the Marys but ironically, they weren’t in a position to move. The dead man is alive and the alive men working for the empire become like dead people.

The resurrection of Jesus proves- once again- that God keeps God’s promises. But the Marys don’t get to tarry long at the empty grave, as

the angel gives them their marching orders. The Marys leave to fulfill their mission with a mixture of fear and joy. That is resurrection faith-trembling and running at the same time. "Fear, on it's own, provides poor motivation for obedience. But joy, properly guided, makes us run to tell the story" (Greg Carey, *WP*). The risen Christ disrupts our settled grief and complacency and moves us on. The women do not linger at the empty tomb to analyze it. The gospel is not solved like a riddle; it is followed like a road. German Theologian Karl Barth once said, "The gospel is not a religious message to inform us of something we did not know before, but the announcement of an event that compels decision." The resurrection is not merely interesting. It is directional. It sends us somewhere. Easter does not remove us from the world; it returns us to it. Augustine wrote, "We are an Easter people, and Alleluia is our song." But Easter people are people on the move. The angel says, "He is not here." Which means if we are going to meet him, we cannot stay here either.

And just as the two Marys were being obedient, they met Jesus on the road. Now I have all kind of questions for another sermon about what Jesus looked like or how they recognized him; nonetheless, I'll say this... ghosts do not have feet, but the post-resurrected Jesus did! The Marys grabbed Jesus' feet, and worshiped him. They recognize him! But this happens only after the angel transforms their minds by showing them that Christ is risen; he is not in the tomb. Jesus quickly tells them the same message the angel had given them: Don't be afraid. But he does have one difference- Go and tell my brothers and sisters to meet me in

Galilee. I'll see them there. Notice that through the power of the resurrection, the disciples, who denied and abandoned Jesus in his hour of need, have been forgiven and restored to their standing as "brothers and sisters." By Jesus saying this, Matthew is trying to remind us that Jesus is also fulfilling his promise that though the sheep are scattered, he will gather them together again in Galilee. Jesus doesn't tell them that he will accompany them to Jerusalem to see the other disciples; instead he instructs these two women to tell the male disciples. Besides the Resurrection, the pinnacle of our Christian faith, my other favorite part of today's story is that two women are the first to preach the good news of Jesus' resurrection back in Galilee. Galilee has special meaning for Matthew, as it is not only the place for this promise; it is also the place where Jesus' ministry, which embodied the dawning reign of God, had been lived out. It's the place where the gospel was extended to the Gentiles. Yes, "the risen Jesus is to be expected in the places of his once and future ministry, in all those places of grace-full endeavor, where healing, feeding, teaching, and even suffering are undertaken in his company" (Cameron Murchison, *FOW*). So, where's Galilee for us? Where is God commissioning us to return to where we will meet the Risen Christ on the road?

Pope Francis in one of his Easter vigil homilies (2014) said, "to return to Galilee means to re-read everything on the basis of the cross and its victory, fearlessly; 'do not be afraid.' To re-read everything- Jesus' preaching, his miracles, the new community, the excitement and the defections, even the betrayal- to re-read everything starting from the

end, which is a new beginning, *from this supreme act of love.*” “That is one way to find Jesus again: for us to literally turn the pages of our Bibles back to the start of the Gospels, reading it all now through the lens of Jesus’ supreme act of love. Yet, Pope Francis took it a step further saying, ‘Returning to Galilee can also mean treasuring in our heart the living memory of when Jesus first called us to follow him, that moment when Jesus made us realize that he loved us.’ In other words, that moment when we were first moved” (Campbell and Fohr).

Poet T.S. Elliott wrote these words in his work entitled, “Little Gidding.” “We shall not cease from exploration and the end of all of our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.” “‘Go back to where it all began,’ the angel tells those women. And Jesus’ words echo them. ‘Go to Galilee,’ he says. Back to the start. Back to the source. Go back to the shores where they were first called, where they were first moved, where first they set their judgments aside to see the crowds being fed, see the sick being healed, see the powerless moved into a movement. Go back to it all, Jesus tells them. Because Easter, it turns out, is not the end point on a journey. Because there, if you are still open, if you are still curious, if you are willing to be obedient, willing to be moved, willing to be transformed- there you will meet Jesus on the road- again. You see, that’s the curious thing about being moved- we are moved spiritually and physically. The things that move us, *move us*. They open us and compel us to keep on keeping on, to keep on learning, connecting, and seeking sources of transformation, understanding, and growth. Today, on Easter Sunday, we are given a final lesson about the

journey: **that it is ongoing**" (Campbell and Fohr). The Christian life is lived between those two movements: worship and witness. Awe and assignment. There is still the work of justice to do! Not work to earn resurrection, mind you- that is finished- but work that flows from resurrection. So let us return to our Galilees and tell this amazingly good news. Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed! Let us stay curious enough to approach the mystery of our faith and courageous enough to follow where led. Easter people, let us be so amazed- so astounded- so inspired- so in awe- by Christ's resurrection that we move! Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed, and he lives among us! Hallelujah and Amen!