

EASTSIDE COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH

SUNDAY, APRIL 4, 2021 – EASTER

SERMON: “Do Not Fear!”

TEXT: Mt. 28:1-10

It is hard to remember a time when we didn't have virtually instant access to information. If a major crisis happens in the world, we can watch it on tv and on-line round-the-clock with up-to-date information and images. Remember when that wasn't the case and you had to wait for information to trickle down.

In 19th century Europe, one of the greatest battles of the age was the battle of Waterloo pitting the British forces of Wellington versus the French forces of Napoleon.

A signalman was placed on top of Winchester Cathedral. His job was to watch the sea and wait for a signal to come from a ship on the horizon. When he received the message, he was to pass it on to another man waiting on a high hill and that person would pass it on and on and on. This is how news of the battle would be transmitted to the anxious British people.

Finally, a signal was received from a ship on a particularly foggy day. The first word was “Wellington.” The signalman waited for the second which was finally transmitted, “Defeated.” Then something happened. The fog closed in on the ship and it could no longer be seen by those on shore. “Wellington defeated!” was the message that was sent throughout the country and the country went into a state of shock and mourning. After a few hours the fog lifted, and the signal was sent again – “Wellington defeated the enemy!” The full and correct message covered the countryside and a nation rejoiced!

This week we have followed along with a frenzied crowd as the Messiah enters Jerusalem. We have followed the events of the week as joy turned to sorrow for the anxious crowds. Impromptu shouts of “Hosanna” have just as quickly turned sour and become shouts of “Crucify Him!” We have seen the story turn dark and scary and sad as the hopes and dreams of many followers have been dashed and hope has died and is buried in a borrowed tomb and we wait to see...

As we wait, let's get a glimpse of what is to come by reading Mt. 28:1-10:

28 Early on Sunday morning, as the new day was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out to visit the tomb.

² Suddenly there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled aside the stone, and sat on it. ³ His face shone like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. ⁴ The guards shook with fear when they saw him, and they fell into a dead faint.

⁵ Then the angel spoke to the women. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He isn't here! He is risen from the dead, just as he said would happen. Come, see where his body was lying. ⁷ And now, go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and he is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there. Remember what I have told you."

⁸ The women ran quickly from the tomb. They were very frightened but also filled with great joy, and they rushed to give the disciples the angel's message. ⁹ And as they went, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they ran to him, grasped his feet, and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Don't be afraid! Go tell my brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see me there."

For 3 hours Jesus hung on a cross in the process of dying. There were only a handful of faithful at the foot of the cross in agony. The one they loved best was in agony and there was nothing they could do about it...but wait. Many more had fled to the darkness in fear what the religious or Roman authorities might do to them.

And then Jesus died!

What had happened to the light? Matthew started his recounting of the life of Jesus with the prophecy from Isaiah 9:1-2:

**¹⁵ “In the land of Zebulun and of Naphtali,
beside the sea, beyond the Jordan River,
in Galilee where so many Gentiles live,
¹⁶ the people who sat in darkness
have seen a great light.
And for those who lived in the land where death casts its shadow,
a light has shined.”**

Luke tells us that at noon on the day Jesus died, the sun went dark. The land literally fell into darkness!

But we know that the darkness temporarily hid part of the message!

After Jesus dies, Matthew tells us how Joseph of Arimathea wrapped Jesus body in a burial cloth and at least two of the woman disciples were present (Mary Magdalene and the other Mary). The custom of the day was to bury the body wrapped with special spices. These spices encourage the decomposition of the body. A year later, you would open the tomb and take the bones that were left and put them in a box called an ossuary. This ossuary or “bone box” would be sealed, often with an inscription etched into it, and placed in an opening in the tomb wall.

There is one thing that seems all to true...everyone...believer, critic, or skeptic believed that Jesus was gone for good. The skeptics seemed to have understood what Jesus was saying before his death about rising again on the third day a bit more than the disciples. The religious leaders approached the Roman authorities and asked for the tomb to be officially sealed. Tomb entrances were sealed several different ways. Jesus’ tomb was sealed by a huge circular stone that was wedged open while access to inside was necessary, and then it would be rolled into a trough or rut and would be securely sealed. The religious leaders went one step further and

asked that an official roman seal would be attached to the stone and the tomb so that no one would open it without permission.

Not only did the sun go dark during the events of that first Easter, but creation itself, the earth, trembled not once but twice. In Matthew 27:51 we are told that at the moment Jesus died there was an earthquake. Now, in Matthew 28 the earth quakes again! Apparently, just before sunrise, A.T. Robertson quotes Cornelius a Lapide as saying:

***“The earth, which trembled with sorrow
at the Death of Christ as it
were leaped for joy at His Resurrection.”***

Matthew gives the understanding the earthquake corresponded with the appearance of the angel at the tomb, even the possible means by which the stone was rolled away.

Matthew has given us a gripping account of the life and ministry of Jesus. It began with angelic messages to Joseph on two occasions and to the Magi that hampered Herod’s plans for killing young Messiah. Now an angel oversees the resurrection story at the empty tomb.

Matthew is the only gospel writer that tells us that the angel of the Lord rolls away the stone, and then he sits on it. This is where the women encounter the angel and hear the message of the risen Lord. The stone that was meant to assure Jesus remains in the tomb becomes the pulpit for the announcement that death had been defeated! The stone is rolled away, not to let the risen Jesus out but to let the women in to witness the fact of the empty tomb!

DO NOT FEAR!

A major theme in the Bible and one that is perfectly fulfilled at the resurrection is the message that the angel tells the women, “Do not fear!” The same message that Luke recounts to John the Baptist’s father, Zechariah. It is the same message given to the young maiden Mary at the announcement that she would be the

Mother of Jesus. It was the same message given to the shepherd's keeping watch over their flocks by night.

It is the same message given to you and to me as we celebrate the risen Lord two-thousand plus years later. The message remains the same. Paul reminds Timothy of the message in 2 Timothy 1:7:

⁷ For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.

The message is no longer hidden by the fog of darkness and sin. The full message is proclaimed today:

“Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.

Are you fearful today? The message of Easter is the same message of Christmas... “Do not fear!” You are invited today to enter the tomb and realize for yourself that it is empty! Jesus kept his promise. Death itself could not contain Jesus because Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God – the one who was crucified and now lives. He is the first and last, the beginning and the end. He is the God of Creation, He is the one who keeps his promises and He is the one who took our condemnation and punishment on himself so that we could find true forgiveness.

Once again, our Christian celebrations demand a response. Easter, much like Christmas, demands us to make a decision about who Jesus is. That decision is the most important one that you will make in your life. Who is Jesus? In scripture we read:

¹² There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

And Romans 10:9 says:

⁹ If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

If you find yourself living in fear this Easter, I invite you to visit the empty tomb once more. Remind yourself of gift of salvation that Jesus offers you and the fact of the Sovereignty of God. God is in control. He can be trusted. Even in the midst of pandemics, viruses, cancer, and calamity, we can trust the words of the shepherd king:

A psalm of David.

**¹ The LORD is my shepherd;
I have all that I need.**

**² He lets me rest in green meadows;
he leads me beside peaceful streams.**

**³ He renews my strength.
He guides me along right paths,
bringing honor to his name.**

**⁴ Even when I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will not be afraid,
for you are close beside me.**

**Your rod and your staff
protect and comfort me.**

**⁵ You prepare a feast for me
in the presence of my enemies.
You honor me by anointing my head with oil.
My cup overflows with blessings.**

**⁶ Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me
all the days of my life,**

**and I will live in the house of the LORD
forever.**

Choose today to live a life serving the risen Lord and Saviour. He will never disappoint you. He will give you the foundation you need to live in this fallen world of uncertainty.

He is risen...He is risen indeed!

Let's pray....