

The Vigil of Easter – April 4, 2026 – “Come and See, Go and Tell”
Matthew 28:1-10

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Grace, mercy, and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ.

This is the night! – the focal point of the church year, when sin, death, and evil meet their match in the resurrection of Jesus. This an ancient service of the church, though long neglected in the western church until it was revived around 70 years ago. And what is particularly valuable and appealing about the Easter Vigil is that it gives Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection a cosmic perspective. This is not just about fixing broken and sinful human beings, it is about healing and renewing the entire cosmos. It is about new creation, which is why in the ancient church it was thought to be a particularly appropriate moment for baptizing new Christians and joining them to new life in Christ the church. It’s why we still remember and affirm our baptism at this service, and why, whenever we can, we bring in new members at this service.

The resurrection account from Matthew’s Gospel helps us out here, by also connecting Jesus’ death and resurrection to the larger creation, and by giving us some helpful clues about our part in what God is doing in Jesus. First, Matthew involves the earth in ways the other Gospel writers don’t. At Jesus’ crucifixion, when he breathes his last, not only is the curtain of the temple torn in two, as in Mark and Luke, but there is also an earthquake that splits rocks and open tombs. Now here in the resurrection account, when the angel comes to roll away the stone, there is another earthquake. It’s almost as if the earth itself is recognizing the significance of Jesus’ death and resurrection, and celebrating the new creation that is about to happen. Matthew’s Gospel is all about showing how prophesy is fulfilled, and this is something Jesus foretold back in chapter 24 when he talked about the coming apocalypse. Earthquakes would be one of the signs of a new beginning, and he compared them to the pain of childbirth.

I talked last night about there being two Jesuses in Matthew’s passion account. What I didn’t tell you is there are also two Marys. Now I can’t do with them the same kind of thing I did with the two Jesuses, but I do think that Matthew wants us to notice them. He wants us to notice that they are watching. They are witnesses. They saw Jesus’ body placed in the tomb and they saw the stone rolled across the opening. And then they see the angel come down and open Jesus’ tomb. And when the angel speaks to them, it wants to make sure they have the full picture. “Come and see,” the angel says, “come and see the place where he lay.” In other words, “Come and see that the tomb really is empty, that he really isn’t here, and trust my message that he really is risen.”

It’s hard to know what they were feeling at that moment. They saw that Jesus’ body wasn’t in the tomb, but did they trust the message? Matthew tells us that they left “with fear and great joy.” So, at best they were filled with mixed feelings, afraid and joyful and the same time. And this is how Jesus finds them. Now they are witnesses not just of an empty tomb. Now they experience the risen Christ face to face, and then fall down on their knees, grab ahold of him, and worship. It’s really him. He really is alive.

But being witnesses is only half of their calling. The other half is going and telling. It was the angels charge to them, and now Jesus repeats it. “Go and tell,” he says to them. “Go and tell my brothers and sisters to go to Galilee,” and I’ll meet them there. And Galilee is not only their home, it’s the crossroads of the larger world. That’s why it was called “Galilee of the Gentiles,” as Matthew reminded us back at the beginning of his Gospel. Galilee will be the staging ground for the next part of the story, when Jesus sends his disciples to go and tell the world. Go and teach, go and baptize, go and make disciples.

And that's where we come in. Because the disciples went from Galilee into all the world, because they told what they saw, because they proclaimed Jesus' promise, we now have the privilege of continuing their double calling of coming and seeing and going and telling. You could say that the church is the new Galilee. It is the place where we come to see Jesus because he has promised to meet us there. It is where he shows up as promised among those gathered in his name, becoming known to us in word and sacrament; in the waters of baptism, in the bread and wine of Holy Communion, and in his promise to be with us always. And the church is also the place from where we are sent, like the disciples were sent, to go out into the world bearing witness to what we have seen and heard, and sharing the good news that has transformed our lives.

“Do not be afraid.” “Come and see.” “Go and tell.” Because Christ is risen! Alleluia!
(Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!)