

## “Healed and Still Healing: Commission of Christ”

### Matthew 28:1-10

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. **2** And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. **3** His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. **4** For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. **5** But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. **6** He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he<sup>[a]</sup> lay. **7** Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead,<sup>[b]</sup> and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message for you.” **8** So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. **9** Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. **10** Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

**11** While they were going, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests everything that had happened. **12** After the priests<sup>[c]</sup> had assembled with the elders, they devised a plan to give a large sum of money to the soldiers, **13** telling them, “You must say, ‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ **14** If this comes to the governor’s ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” **15** So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story is still told among the Jews to this day.

**16** Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. **17** When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. **18** And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **19** Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

The Word of God for the People of God

As I sat down to write this sermon, I realized I had nothing....nothing to say, nothing to capture the awe and wonder of Easter morning, nothing to share except a bone weary tiredness which continues to drain my Spirit each and every day. I wish I could tell you that something miraculous happened to change this weariness to life but no. As I sat down at my computer, I had nothing.

So I did what we all do as people of faith in moments like these. I turned to our sacred text for words of comfort and hope. I wanted, needed to hear this life transforming, this life giving story of hope and new life one more time.

As a pastor, I cannot tell you how many times I have preached the Resurrection story. As a spiritual leader, I cannot tell you how many times I have reminded others, reminded myself that we are a resurrection people, called to transformation, that we are called to witness to the new life which is moving in and among us.

And I will also say that no matter how many times I have shared, preached or taught this particular Easter story, I do not think I have ever really paid attention to exactly how this story begins. It begins with nothing.

In our text for today, we are told that in the Gospel of Matthew, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb, that unlike the versions found in Mark and Luke, they did not have spices with them to prepare the body. They

simply go to the tomb. They go to the tomb with no expectations, with no agenda, with no words prepared.

I imagine that they too were bone weary tired at this point in the story. After all, they had seen Jesus brought to trial. They had seen him condemned. They had seen him crucified and laid in a tomb. And after the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, they went to the tomb with nothing.

For me, that is the most humbling and most renewing part of our faith, the most humbling and most transforming part of Easter... the fact that Resurrection does not come to us because we are prepared or because we are ever ready. Rather, resurrection finds us when we have nothing. It finds us when we least expect it simply because we go to the Tomb. Even in our bone weary tiredness, even when we feel like we have nothing to offer, we can find the strength and the courage to trust that the darkness does not have the last word because we know how the story ends.

For us as people of faith, resurrection happens because we continue to take the next step, to take the next breath, to do the next right thing. Because even as I stand in an empty sanctuary, surrounded by nothing... no large crowds, no trumpets, no kids hopped up on candy, Easter morning has arrived.

You see, the empty tomb is about more than just one moment in time. It is about us as people of faith imagining a reality reborn, a reality where even when

we have nothing, we know that God has something...something which will change the way the story of sadness and pain ends, something which will bring forth new life, something which will bring healing and wholeness for all of God's people.

And this message of comfort, this message of hope comes to us through the very first words spoken on that day of new life. According to the Gospel of Matthew the very first words spoken on that new day were Do Not Be Afraid.

These very words of Do Not Be Afraid have been spoken to God's people over and over again throughout history. They were spoken in the psalms as the people brought to God their grief and sorrow. They were shared with our faith ancestors as God called them to do a challenging thing like leave their known existence and begin a journey, not really knowing where this journey would take them. Do Not Be Afraid were the words spoken to the shepherds as the angels announced the birth of Jesus. And they are the same words spoken to announce the resurrection of Jesus.

These words of Do Not Be Afraid are spoken to the women who came to the Tomb, women who were filled with a bone weary tiredness, women who felt like they had nothing more to offer. These words of Do Not Be Afraid have been shared with communities of faith over the years as they experienced uncertain times.

These words of Do Not Be Afraid have been given to us as the people of God every single time when we have faced difficult challenges along the way.

They have been and continue to be offered as a way to reassure us, to strengthen us, to remind us that this world will never have the last word.

Time and time again, these words of Do Not Be Afraid have been spoken to God's people by God's messengers of hope and peace and today is no different.

Just like on that first Easter morning when the angel spoke to the women, on this most unusual Easter morning, I say unto you: Do Not Be Afraid. Even though we have come to the tomb with nothing, God is here. God is here offering us strength and courage. God is here, reminding us that we are not alone. God is here, showing us that death and darkness will not have the last word....

Today, tomorrow, and forevermore, as people of faith, we have the strength, we have the courage to take the next step, to take the next breath, to do the next right thing because we have a promise. We know that even though we may feel like we have nothing left except a bone weary tiredness, we know that without a shadow of a doubt God is at work in this world, bringing about a new reality, bringing about a new vision here on Earth, bringing about a new promise for all of God's people.

These words of Do Not Be Afraid are not offered to "counsel us from having fear. Rather, they are offered to let us know that we do not have to be our fear. Let me say that again... These words of Do Not Be Afraid are not offered to "counsel

us from having fear. Rather, they are offered to let us know that we do not have to be our fear.

Because of this life transforming understanding which shifts how we see the world, how we experience the world, as people of faith, no matter the challenges we face, no matter how uncertain our times may be, we can stand in the place of compassion. We can celebrate the gift of life. We can have the hope to see through the brokenness to see the “hidden wholeness” of all things.”

As people of faith, we do not have to be afraid because we know that light and love has overcome the darkness. We know that we are named and claimed by a Savior who loves us so much that he came so that we might have new life.

So as we continue our journey of transformation, as we continue to live out our call to be a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world, I say unto you on this glorious Easter morning, bringing to all of us a message of God’s love and hope: People of God, Do Not Be Afraid! For the one you are looking for is not here, he has been raised. Indeed, he is going on ahead of you, out into the world, bringing healing and wholeness for all of God’s people. Thanks be to God! Amen!