

God's Not Finished

On Friday, we left this sanctuary in darkness and in silence. We heard the gospel account of the passion of Jesus Christ. We heard the account of his crucifixion and his death. It's clear that Jesus didn't just *appear* to die. He wasn't asleep or unconscious or comatose. No. Jesus died a real, physical, human death. All four gospels testify to this truth.

Matthew tells us that at the moment Jesus takes his last breath, the earth heaves and shudders. Rocks crack and shatter. It was as though the good creation conceded defeat. The One through whom all things were made was no more. It really looked as though the powers of darkness had won. It sure looked like God was finished.

On Skull Hill, women watch from a distance. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James have witnessed the suffering and the death of Jesus. They, too, have left the place in darkness and in silence. They've seen his body placed in the tomb. They've seen a massive stone placed against its entrance. By order of Pontius Pilate, the stone has been sealed.

Now, after the sabbath, very early on the third day, both Marys return to visit the grave of One they love, as dawn's first rays pierce the shadows. Without warning, the ground beneath their feet quakes violently. As if in answer to Friday afternoon, on Sunday morning the earth trembles once again. God's not finished!

For God's messenger appears—in raiment so dazzling that the women can't look directly at him. Now maybe this sounds a bit farfetched to post-modern ears. But do you not believe that God still sends angelic messengers—to counsel, to guide, to intervene, to protect? In myriad ways, do we not come to an awareness of the presence of angels? Do some not resemble ordinary people, whom we can see with our eyes? Can others be discerned only with our spiritual senses? These messengers come to us because God's not finished.

And God's messenger comes to women at a graveside on the first day of the week. But in Matthew's Gospel, this isn't the first time an angel shows up. Thirty-some years before this point in the narrative, a man named Joseph grieves because his fiancée has become pregnant, and the baby isn't his. An angel of the Lord—could it be the same one?—appears to Joseph, saying:

the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit...and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

Joseph had been without hope. But God wasn't finished.

The angel reappears and, at the tomb, does what no mortal could. Unseals the ponderous stone from the opening. What Matthew wants to be sure you and I understand is that when the stone's rolled back, *the tomb is already empty!*

We don't know what actually took place when the crucified One was raised from the dead. No human eye has seen. We see the resurrection through eyes of faith. We don't know how it happened. All that matters is that we embrace its deep, deep mystery. And believe. For belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ—this belief in the ultimate, definitive event of human history—this belief is the bedrock of our faith, the faith of Christians for two thousand years.

But two women—two Marys—were the first ever to hear that Christ has been raised. The first to be commissioned to go and tell the amazing news. God sends a messenger to tell astonished, terrified women—and to tell you and me—*Don't be afraid. And don't look for Jesus in a graveyard. He's not in a cemetery. The tomb couldn't hold him. He's alive!*

And God who has raised him from the dead isn't finished.

Not even close! When we first hear of the resurrection, fear turns to joy. For on our way from that place, the risen One meets us. Greets us. He's somehow changed. He may not look the way we expect him to. Yet in the presence of the risen Lord, we worship. In awe and adoration. We worship this One in spirit and in truth.

But, my sisters and brothers, worship is only the beginning. It's in worship that these first followers of Jesus hear him calling his disciples to journey all the way to Galilee. To keep passing on the wondrous message that he's been raised from the dead. To keep spreading the great good news all over the first-century world.

And in this twenty-first century, Christ is calling *you and me* to go to Galilee. Which was originally known as Galilee of the Gentiles. Of people very different from Jesus and his fellow Jews.

So, what is *your* Galilee? Could your Galilee be an unfamiliar place inhabited by folk who seem different? A setting in which the customs seems strange? And *where* is your Galilee? Could it be far away? Could it be nearby? It may not even be a

specific place. Could your Galilee be serving in a capacity in which you've never before served? One located, perhaps, outside your comfort zone?

When you think about going where Jesus calls you to go and doing what Jesus calls you to do, does anxiety fill you? Are you—like so many men and women in the Scriptures who fulfill God's plan and accomplish God's work—afraid that you won't have the right words? That you don't have the right gifts? That you're not equipped to be God's useful vessel, to be God's faithful servant?

If so, I have marvelous news for you this beautiful morning, no matter what your age or your life situation or circumstances. You are a work in progress. God who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it. God's not finished with you!

Even when you're sent to Galilee. *Especially* when you're sent to Galilee. And in all your Galilees, you'll know the joy that springs from being used for a mighty purpose.

In all your Galilees, the risen Christ has promised that you will see him. Wherever he summons you to be in mission and in ministry, he goes ahead of you to that place. When you arrive, he

will be there waiting for you. There, you will see him in the eyes of the forgotten ones for whom he calls you to care. There, he will be with you in every act of compassion and kindness and love. You can go to Galilee in confidence and in trust. God still works in an earthshaking way!

Easter people, every time God ensures that great stones get rolled away; every time God removes seemingly insurmountable obstacles from your path; every time God sends hope when you have given up hope; every time God brings you out of a dark tomb of despair and brokenness into new light and wholeness; every time God fills your life with love and your heart with delight; every time God transforms tragedy into triumph, you know the power of the resurrection to be at work, and you know that God's not finished!

For the story of God's inbreaking into human life doesn't end with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It doesn't end with the witness of the apostles. It doesn't end with this book we call the Bible. It doesn't end with the martyrs and saints of the church's first centuries. It doesn't end with the Protestants of the Reformation. It doesn't end with John and Charles Wesley and the early Methodists. The story continues in you and through

you and because of you. You are a part of God's ongoing, loving, saving activity with the people of God, whose eternal kingdom is both present and yet to come. For God's not finished!

So, beloved, on this Easter Day, on this day that God has made, rejoice and be glad. Let all the morning stars sing together, and all the children of God shout for joy! For death is swallowed up in victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! Through his blessed resurrection, you have the sure and certain hope of life in him. New life. Life that begins today. Life everlasting in the One who lives and reigns in glory—the glory in which you are to be revealed.

For God's not finished. Thanks be to God! Alleluia!

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.