

Sermon for April 9, 2023 – Easter Sunday

Matthew 28:1-10 (EHV)

Theme: **Rejoice! Jesus is Risen:**

- 1) To show His enemies powerless!
- 2) To fulfill His promises!
- 3) To give His followers joy!

¹ After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. ² Suddenly, there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, and going to the tomb, he rolled away the stone and was sitting on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. ⁴ The guards were so terrified of him that they shook and became like dead men. ⁵ 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. He has risen, just as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. ⁷ Go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has risen from the dead! And look, he is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see him.’ See, I have told you!” ⁸ They hurried away from the tomb, with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” They approached, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go, tell my brothers that they should go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”

I had an uncle who was a Catholic missionary in Angola. One autumn, while I was still a child living in Wetaskiwin, he called us on the phone. He promised to come in spring to visit us in Canada. Having never met this uncle, his promised visit gave me great joy.

Unfortunately, my uncle had enemies. The communist government in Angola hated him for being a Christian and had a military vehicle “accidentally” kill him just a few days before Christmas. Death prevented my uncle from keeping his promise. Death prevented me from having joy.

Jesus promised his followers many wonderful things: the forgiveness of sins, freedom from their enemies, everlasting life with God, etc. All these promises gave his disciples great joy. But Jesus’ enemies killed him. What happened to all of Jesus’ promises? Did they die with him on the cross? No, just the opposite! You see, Jesus is not like my uncle or any other human. Death could not prevent him from keeping his promises because death could not prevent him from returning to life.

With the Gospel of St. Matthew as our guide, let us discover why death cannot take away our true joy under the theme **Rejoice! Jesus is Risen:** *1) To show His enemies powerless! 2) To fulfill His promises! 3) To give His followers joy!*

Part One: Jesus is risen to show his enemies powerless.

As sunlight started to glow on the horizon and birds began to sing on that first Easter Sunday in Jerusalem, there was no indication that this day would be any different than any other Sunday preceding it. There was, however, tension in the air.

Just two days earlier, a man named Jesus was crucified for claiming to be the Messiah - the promised King of the Jews. Many people held him in high regard, considering him a great prophet. His many miracles and powerful teaching made others wonder whether he was the Saviour foretold in sacred Scripture. But his enemies had killed him. "How could this happen?" his followers thought. "How could Jesus die if he was the Messiah? Didn't he promise to establish a new kind of Kingdom on this earth? He can't do that from the grave, can he?" Therefore, all their hope seemed to have died with Jesus on the cross.

Jesus' followers failed to realize that, since the wages of sin is death, the Saviour had to die to pay for all sin. Both Jesus and the Old Testament scriptures testified to that fact. Sadly, the image of their dear friend and teacher hanging disfigured and dead on the cross was so etched in their minds that all they could focus on was their feeling of loss and hopelessness.

Jesus' enemies, on the other hand, were ecstatic: they were finally rid of him! But they also remembered something Jesus said that his followers had forgotten: that he would rise on the third day after he died. Afraid the disciples might steal his body, they sealed Jesus' tomb and posted armed guards around it with Pilate's permission. They did everything they could to make sure this dead man remained dead.ⁱ Little did Jesus' enemies realize that Jesus was not a mere man. He was exactly who he claimed to be: the Christ, the Son of God!ⁱⁱ Even though the world, death, and the devil tried to overcome him, Jesus would reveal his enemies as powerless by rising from the grave.

Our text tells us that, as dawn was about to break, *there was a great earthquake*. At that very moment, *an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, and going to the tomb, he rolled away the stone and was sitting on it*. Note that the angel didn't let Jesus out of the tomb; he came to show Jesus' enemies that his grave was already empty. Jesus had risen from the dead!

The angel's *appearance was like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow*. *The guards were so terrified of him that they shook and became like dead men* – that is, they fainted in fear. When they regained their consciousness, they fled in fright. Try as they might, Jesus' enemies could not keep him in the grave.

Already a few verses into this short account, we find a reason to rejoice: Jesus' resurrection reveals that his enemies are powerless against him. That fact not only includes his earthly enemies but also our greater spiritual enemies: sin, death and the devil. How so? Think of it this way: the Bible says that *the wages of sin is death*.ⁱⁱⁱ However, Jesus died as someone who never sinned to pay for the sins of another: us. The fact that death could not hold him shows that God fully accepted his payment for our sins.

Therefore, since sin has been paid for and death defeated, the devil has lost his power to condemn us. We are free from his accusations because they hold no weight before God! We receive this freedom as our own through repentance and faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: Jesus' resurrection marks the beginning of a new era. The wall of sin that separated us from God has been removed. We now can come before our God without fear – trusting in his mercy to forgive our sins for Christ's sake. Want proof? Look, Jesus' tomb is empty, and his enemies run in fear! Rejoice! Jesus rose to show both his and our enemies powerless.

Part Two: Jesus is risen to fulfill his promises.

The sun peeked over the horizon shortly after the soldiers ran away in fear. Some women were on their way to the tomb to pay their last respects to Jesus: the man they loved and trusted as their Saviour. They waited until Sunday to do this because Jewish law forbade them to do any work on the Sabbath. How scary their morning walk must have been as they wondered whether Jesus' enemies would try to arrest his followers too. Yet, they risked possible danger out of love and respect for their Saviour.

We can't help but wonder what they thought as they walked. "Jesus, our dearest Jesus, is dead! Why did God allow this to happen? He was such a good person that we had hoped that he was the Messiah. What will we do now that he is dead?"

Utter shock overcame the women when they reached the tomb: the stone was rolled away, and Jesus' body was gone! As a mixture of confusion and sorrow overwhelmed them, the angel, who kept watch over the tomb, appeared to them and said, "*Do not be afraid! I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified.*"

Why were the women so sad, confused and afraid? Didn't they remember prophecies like the 16th Psalm, in which the Messiah said: "*You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay?*"^{iv} Didn't they take to heart the many times Jesus prophesied not only his death but also his resurrection on the third day?

Sadly, the shock of Jesus' crucifixion blinded them to these promises. All they could focus on was their sorrow and loss. Don't misunderstand me: it wasn't wrong for Jesus' followers to be sad at his death. What was wrong was allowing their sadness to turn into despair – thinking that all was lost because Jesus was dead.

The angel's message dispelled their fears: "*He is not here. He has risen, just as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. Go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has risen from the dead! And look, he is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see him.' See, I have told you!*" The angel points to the empty tomb as proof that Jesus kept his promise. Jesus has risen from the dead and is alive!

Here is another reason to rejoice: Jesus has kept His promises. He promised to suffer and die for our sins. He vowed to defeat death by rising from the grave. Because Jesus has kept all these promises, we know that all our sins are forgiven. His resurrection proves it.

Jesus has promised us many other things in Scripture. For example, the Lord promises to rescue believers from every evil attack and bring us safely to his heavenly kingdom.^v He promises to work in all things for the good of those who love him.^{vi} He even promises to raise us from the dead on the last day^{vii} so we can live with him forever in paradise.^{viii}

Jesus' resurrection proves that he will keep all these promises, regardless of how fantastic and unbelievable they may seem to our sinful human mind. Rejoice, therefore, because Jesus didn't just rise to show his enemies powerless. He also rose to keep his promises.

Part Three: Jesus is risen to give us joy.

After listening to the angel, the women ran from the tomb. At first, they ran in fear, but soon that fear was replaced with joy. "Could it be true? Is Jesus, our dear Saviour, risen and alive? It seems too good to be true, but an angel himself has told us!" Thus, they ran to tell the disciples the angel's fantastic news.

Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" The word translated here as "greetings" literally means "rejoice." It was a standard Greek greeting in the ancient world, but Jesus brought new meaning to it.

"Rejoice!" Why? The reason was right before the women: Jesus himself, risen and alive! Overcome with the emotion of being in the presence of their living Saviour, *they approached, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him.*

Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid." He rose from the dead, just as the angel said. He most certainly was their Messiah. The forgiveness and salvation he promised them were real.

He went on to say, "*Go, tell my brothers that they should go to Galilee, and there they will see me.*" He calls his disciples "brothers," Oh, what an outstanding term this is! Through faith in Christ, God has adopted us into his family. The LORD is our Father, and Jesus is our brother! What an incredible message of peace and joy Jesus gave these women. How happy they were to tell His disciples the good news.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: Jesus is risen to give us joy! Through faith in his resurrection, we stand at peace with God. Because of what Jesus did, we know we will be raised to life when He comes again on the Last Day and see him as he truly is. Death cannot separate us from him. Death cannot separate believers from each other! Because He lives, we too shall live. Therefore, brothers and sisters in Christ, rejoice: The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.

ⁱ Cf. Matthew 27:62-66

ⁱⁱ Cf. Matthew 26:63-64

ⁱⁱⁱ Romans 6:23 EHV

^{iv} Psalm 16:10 NIV84

^v cf. 2 Timothy 4:18

^{vi} cf. Romans 8:28

^{vii} cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:16

^{viii} f. 2 Peter 3:12