

Sermon for April 20, 2025 – 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!

*<sup>1</sup> After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. <sup>4</sup> The guards were so terrified of him that they shook and became like dead men. <sup>5</sup> The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid! I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. <sup>6</sup> He is not here. He has risen, just as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. <sup>7</sup> 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!” <sup>8</sup> They hurried away from the tomb, with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. <sup>9</sup> Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” They approached, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. <sup>10</sup> 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.”*

My uncle was a Catholic missionary in Angola. One autumn, when I was a child, he called us and promised to visit us in the Spring. Having never met this uncle, I joyfully looked forward to his visit.

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

Jesus promised his followers many wonderful things, such as the forgiveness of sins, freedom from their enemies, and everlasting life with God. All these promises filled His disciples with joy. But Jesus’ enemies killed him. What happened to all of Jesus’ promises? Did they die with him on the cross? No, not at all! You see, unlike my uncle, death could not keep Jesus from fulfilling 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 even death cannot take away our 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 the dawn began to radiate over the horizon and birds started to sing on that first Easter Sunday in Jerusalem, there was no indication that this day would be any different from the Sundays that preceded it. However, tension was in the air.

Just two days earlier, a man named Jesus had been 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 numerous miracles and powerful teaching made others wonder whether he was the Saviour foretold in sacred Scripture. But His enemies 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.” Therefore, all the hope Jesus’ followers had in Him seemed to die 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 rabbi hanging disfigured and dead on the cross was so etched in their minds that they only focused on their feelings of loss and hopelessness, instead of God’s promises.

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 His death. 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.<sup>i</sup> 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!<sup>ii</sup> 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.* Understand that the angel didn’t

let Jesus out of the tomb. No, 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 brief account, we find a reason to rejoice: Jesus' resurrection reveals that His enemies are powerless against Him. This includes not only his earthly enemies but also our greater spiritual foes: sin, death and the devil. How so? Think of it this way: the Bible says that *the wages of sin is death*.<sup>iii</sup> Jesus, however, died sinless. Death, therefore, could not hold him. His resurrection proves that His Father fully accepted His payment for our sins. We are reconciled to God.

Now that Jesus paid for all sins and overcame death, the devil has lost His power to condemn us. His accusations against us hold no weight before God! Jesus has freed us from Satan's tyranny — declaring all who look to Him in repentance and faith as forgiven, righteous, and coheirs of everlasting life with Him in glory.

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 dismantled. We can now approach our God without fear, trusting in his mercy to forgive our sins for Christ's sake. Want proof? See Jesus' empty tomb and how His foes flee in fear! Rejoice! Jesus rose to show His enemies powerless.

Part Two: Jesus is risen to fulfill his promises.

As the soldiers fled, some women made 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 any work on the Sabbath. Their early morning walk must have been terrifying as they wondered if Jesus' enemies would try to arrest his followers too. Yet, they risked possible danger out of love and respect for their Saviour.

As they walked, I imagine them thinking: “Why did God allow our dear Jesus to die? 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 confusion and sorrow washed over them, an angel who kept watch over the tomb appeared 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 16<sup>th</sup> Psalm, which said: *"You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay?"*<sup>iv</sup> 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 pointed to the empty tomb as proof that Jesus kept his promise. Jesus had risen from the dead and is alive!

Here is another reason to rejoice: Jesus had kept his promises. He had promised to suffer and die for our sins and to defeat death by rising from the grave. Because Jesus fulfilled 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 promised to rescue believers from every evil attack and bring us safely to His heavenly kingdom.<sup>v</sup> He promised to work in all things for the good of those who love Him.<sup>vi</sup> He even promised to raise us from the dead on the last day<sup>vii</sup> so we can live with Him forever in paradise.<sup>viii</sup>

Jesus' resurrection demonstrates that He will keep all these promises, regardless of how unbelievable they may seem to our human minds. Therefore, rejoice, because Jesus didn't just rise to show his enemies powerless; he also rose to keep His promises and give us joy.

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 incredible 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 upon 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 had risen from the dead, just as the angel said. He was indeed 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 extraordinary term! 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, nor can it separate believers from one another! Because He lives, we too shall live. Therefore, brothers and sisters in Christ, rejoice: The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.

---

<sup>i</sup> Cf. Matthew 27:62-66

<sup>ii</sup> Cf. Matthew 26:63-64

<sup>iii</sup> Romans 6:23 EHV

<sup>iv</sup> Psalm 16:10 NIV84

<sup>v</sup> cf. 2 Timothy 4:18

<sup>vi</sup> cf. Romans 8:28

<sup>vii</sup> cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:16

<sup>viii</sup> f. 2 Peter 3:12