

## Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

## *Fear and Great Joy*

## Old Testament Lesson

Jeremiah 31:1-6 (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup> At that time, says the Lord, I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people.

<sup>2</sup> Thus says the Lord:

The people who survived the sword  
found grace in the wilderness;

when Israel sought for rest,

<sup>3</sup> the Lord appeared to him from far away.

I have loved you with an everlasting love;  
therefore, I have continued my faithfulness to you.

<sup>4</sup> Again I will build you, and you shall be built,  
O virgin Israel!

Again you shall take your tambourines,  
and go forth in the dance of the merrymakers.

<sup>5</sup> Again you shall plant vineyards  
on the mountains of Samaria;

the planters shall plant,  
and shall enjoy the fruit.

<sup>6</sup> For there shall be a day when sentinels will call  
in the hill country of Ephraim:

"Come, let us go up to Zion,  
to the Lord our God."

## Gospel Lesson

Matthew 27:57-28:10 (NRSV)

<sup>57</sup> When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. <sup>58</sup> He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. <sup>59</sup> So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth <sup>60</sup> and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. <sup>61</sup> Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

<sup>62</sup> The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate <sup>63</sup> and said, "Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.' <sup>64</sup> Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has been raised from the dead,' and the last deception would be worse than the

first.”<sup>65</sup> Pilate said to them, “You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can.”

<sup>66</sup> So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

<sup>1</sup> After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. <sup>4</sup> For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. <sup>5</sup> But 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; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. <sup>7</sup> Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message for you.” <sup>8</sup> So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. <sup>9</sup> Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. <sup>10</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

## Sermon Focus

Matthew’s version of the Easter story is all about “seeing,” about keeping our eyes open and witnessing the world around us. Mary Magdalene and Mary kept their eyes open to witness the entire experience – the crucifixion, the burial, the tomb, and the resurrection. When we keep our eyes open and refuse to turn away from the world, we may see things that are both frightening and wonderful, and yet what we learn in these “eye-opening” experiences can truly be transformative. Yes, Easter is scary and joyous at the same time; resurrection is more than a feel-good metaphor – it changes us.

## Discussion Questions

1. What are the stones that need to be rolled away so that we can see Jesus?
2. Name a time that you had an “eye-opening” experience?
3. How has the current season of weirdness been an “eye-opening” experience?
4. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the tomb just to see it. Not to anoint the body or for any other reason. They went just to see it. Why do you think that is so?
5. When have you experienced both fear and great joy at the same time?
6. Who has helped you be reconciled with God?

## Bible Focus

In this week’s sermon, we heard the story of Easter morning as portrayed in the Gospel of Matthew. All four Gospels have a unique telling of this story. Each of the Gospels were written for different audiences, by different communities who were followers of Jesus. In the story of Easter morning, there are three very unique things that happen in Matthews Gospel.

The first is that the tomb was sealed. There is no mention of this in any other Gospel. The purpose of sealing the tomb was the same as having guards stand watch—to deter the disciples or others from removing the body so that they could claim Jesus’s resurrection.

The second unique thing is that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to the tomb *just* to see the tomb. The other accounts have them coming with oils to anoint the body. But in this Gospel the writers want us to focus on their intention to “see.” This concept of “seeing” like really, really seeing Jesus is found throughout the Gospel as a metaphor.

The third unique aspect to this story in Matthew is that when Mary Magdalene and the other Mary come to the tomb the stone was still there. They feel the earthquake, and see the angel who appears like lightening, and see the soldiers freeze or faint from what they were seeing. The stone is rolled away by the angel. All three of these unique things point to this whole seeing, witnessing thing that Matthew’s Gospel is known for.

The angel then extends the invitation to “come and see.” The stone being rolled away reveals that Jesus isn’t even there anyway. And this impacts the witness of the Marys. They were able to witness that Jesus wasn’t there. These women left the tomb with fear and great joy. It was really scary and really wonderful, both at the same time. They run to tell the disciples that the tomb was empty and about the angel. On their way to the disciples, they run into the resurrected Jesus. And Jesus asks them to tell the disciples to go to Galilee; which is where the Mary’s were already doing. Why would Jesus tell them to tell them to go to Galilee? Jesus answers his own question, because there they will see me. Because Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were able to really “see” Jesus, they were able to help the other disciples “see” as well.

## Discussion Questions

1. Why is it so hard for the disciples, as well as for us, to keep our eyes open to the entire experience of Jesus?
2. The angel rolled away the stone to the sealed tomb and then invited the Marys to “come and see.” The stone being rolled away reveals that Jesus isn’t even there anyway. So, where has Jesus been if not in the tomb?
3. How can we help others “see” God?

## Prayer

 (Inspired by Jeremiah 31:1-6)

Holy and eye-opening God, you have saved us from the sword and given us grace in the wilderness. When we’ve sought for rest, you appear to us, helping us to really see you. You have loved us with an everlasting love and continued your faithfulness. We witness this in the works of your mighty deeds and in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Build us again, Lord. Build us again so that we may go forth and dance and make music and praise you together as your people. Teach us to again plant seeds and taste fruit and be grateful, Lord. Grateful for you, grateful for each other, grateful for the resurrection. With fear and great joy, we witness your almighty power and love. Amen.

*Easter is scary and joyous at the same time;  
resurrection is more than a feel-good metaphor – it changes us.*