

Easter Sunday, 2011  
Texts: Matthew 28 and John 20

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### **The Resurrected Christ: Why Don't They Get Their Stories Straight?**

Well, I don't know if you noticed it, but we did something a little different with the readings this morning. Today we heard two versions of Jesus' resurrection from the dead: one from Matthew and one from John. They're not the same, are they? One's got an earthquake, the other doesn't (that's pretty different). There're guards at the tomb in one, but not the other. One angel in one story, two angels in the other. Men come see the tomb, men don't come to see the tomb. The women can touch Jesus. The women can't touch Jesus. There are a lot of differences. And that's just *two* stories of the resurrection. There are two more. Four gospels, with four different versions. Now, you'd think, if they were gonna take the world's most important—most unbelievable story ever... You'd think, if they were gonna set it down for the all the world to hear... If they were gonna tell this tale for all posterity...

*You'd think they'd get their stories straight!* But they don't do they? They don't even try. They don't try. And I think there's a good reason for that. These stories make it clear: None of us, none of us meets the risen Christ the same way. We each encounter God differently. I mean, look, you're here *in church* this morning, so you must have encountered God somewhere, somehow in your life. But each of our experiences of God is different. Mine is different than yours. Yours is different than yours. Than yours, or yours, right? Maybe for you it was a big flash of blinding white lightning. Maybe the earth quaked beneath you. And some miracle hit you so hard, so strong, it just filled you up with faith, and from that day on, you just knew, *God is with me, I believe!* And you ain't looking back. (That'd be cool). Of course, it's not always like that, is it? Maybe your brush with God isn't so immediate as that. Maybe it's been more like stumbling upon an empty tomb; the whole God thing a bit of a mystery. Clues left around like linen wrappings. *What's all this God stuff really mean? Where does Jesus fit in my life?*

Or, maybe you've met a few angels in your time. Those bright, shining, *good people* we wish we were more like. Those compassionate souls who take us by the hand and say, *Why are you weeping?* Those people who point us toward Jesus by showing us just what a loving God looks like in action. I don't know, I don't know how the living God has been made known to you in your life. God reveals his presence to each of us in different ways. That's how God

operates it seems (same today as 2000 years ago). That's why it's so cool to witness the great drama of that first Easter morning unfold today. We get to watch all these different incredible encounters with God. And we get to see how all those different characters respond when the amazing truth of God comes near to them. We see how each reacts when they get a sign of the resurrected Christ. They don't all respond the same, do they?

How do guards at the tomb respond? What happens them? *They fall down like dead men! Terrified. Uh-oh... we're in trouble!* Well, that's the guards. But what about Jesus' friends and followers? Even them, even the ones who knew him, and loved him: they don't all respond the same to the idea that their friend and teacher might just be back from the dead. They each react differently. And what each of them does, gives us a little window into their faith.

My favorite is 'the disciple that Jesus loved.' We don't even know his name, but he's great. He gets it *immediately*. That guy runs to the tomb, sees the stone rolled away, and thinks, *Ah, yes, he's risen from the grave. Of course. What else could it be?* That's some faith! The bible says 'he saw and believed.' He didn't *see anything*. But he believed. Just like that. Not a second thought about it. (That's impressive). Who's got *that* kinda faith? You all got faith like that? God bless you if you do. I sure wish I did.

Then there's Mary Magdalene. So loving, so passionate. So *brave*. When all the men ran and hid, Mary stood right there at the foot of the cross. Would not leave Jesus for a second. She's the first to reach the tomb in the half-light of dawn. The first to weep when she sees the body gone. Her devotion to Jesus is so concrete, so immediate. All she cares about is keeping Christ close to her. Grabbing on to him and not letting go. Mary's faith is enduring. Even when grief shatters her. Even when things don't make any sense. Even when times are the blackest, she stays. She stays faithful. That's not easy, is it? Faith can be a rollercoaster. Faith makes us vulnerable. Faith can be painful. Scary. Sometimes we wonder, is Christ really with us? Is God with me? Or has he left me all alone? Alone in my grief. Alone in these tough times? Sometimes it's hard to love a Savior we can't see or touch. Faith like Mary's is strenuous. It's hard won. But it's never in vain: "*Mary!*" she hears her name called, and she knows: *'I have seen the Lord.'*

And then, there's Peter.

Then Simon Peter came, and went into the tomb.

He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself.

It's like he's investigating. He's looking for evidence. It's like CSI: *Linen... hm... Cloth... Well, there was a body here. But bodies don't just disappear. Something big happened here. But I don't know what.* When Peter leaves the tomb that morning, he's not sold. The resurrection's not real to him. The good news just isn't real to him yet. He doesn't start to believe 'til much later. *After* they've all talked it over. *After* Mary tells him, *Look, I've seen Jesus, he's alive!* Then he begins to come around.

Well, whatever he thought was real, Peter seems the most real to me. Someone with doubts, with disbelief. Someone who has to be convinced. Someone who doesn't always understand. That seems the most human response. I know I identify most with Peter. Maybe you do too, I don't know. But I take a lot of hope from seeing Peter's kind of struggling faith. I take a lot hope from Peter. He's the guy who spent so much time with Jesus. And in that time, he gets *just about everything wrong*. He does the wrong things. He says the wrong things. He misunderstands Jesus. He denies Jesus. And yet; and yet, Peter is the one God chooses to do amazing things though. The one God puts so much faith in. God catches him as he stumbles, and holds him up. And ultimately, this man of rocky faith becomes the rock of the church. He draws thousand and thousands toward God with his preaching and his powerful works in Christ's name. I take a lot of hope from Peter.

Each one of us experiences God differently. And I don't know how the risen Christ will make himself known to you in the days ahead. But he will. Somehow—3arthquake, angel, gardener or empty tomb—we'll each see some sign of him. And when it comes, some of us will be like those guards at the tomb. So scared to let God in; so unwilling to let ourselves be changed by grace, that we fall down and play dead: *Nope... uhn-unh... can't see you... can't hear you...not listening, nope, uhn-unh.*

But it doesn't have to be that way. We don't have to be terrified to begin a life of faith. We don't need to be afraid to start walking on the path that Jesus points us to. Because it's okay; it's okay if we're not able to see just an empty tomb and say, *Ah, yes, he's risen from the grave. Of course. What else could it be?* It's okay if we're not just like that 'disciple that Jesus loved.' And it's okay if we're not ready today to love Christ with every ounce and fiber

of our being. If right now, we're not ready to go wherever Christ leads just to be near him. Hey, maybe you do have the dauntless faith of Mary Magdalene. But it's okay if you don't. It's okay if we're slow to believe. Slow to start our walk with Jesus. It's okay, if, like Peter, we make missteps and mistakes on the way. If our faith comes in fits and starts. And we need convincing. *It's okay, as long as we keep investigating, like Peter.* Keep asking the questions and keep looking for Christ. As long as we keep walking on that road.

The angel said, 'he has been raised from the dead, and he is  
Going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.'

Jesus *is* on the road ahead. Waiting to meet us.

So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy,  
and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said,  
'Greetings!'

With fear or with joy... Quick or slow... Steady or stumbling... If we walk in his wake, we will find him. We will find Christ waiting for us. Waiting to fill us and our lives with hope beyond hope. With joy beyond despair. And peace beyond pain. Christ is waiting to give us new life in him. Life that never ends. Thanks be to God!

Amen.