

**Easter, April 12, 2020 – See Him in Galilee**

**Given by Rev. Mattei**

Acts 10:34-43; Colossians 3:1-4; Matthew 28:1-10

The hard part about staying away from one another is not being able to *see* each other. Surely, technology has advanced to the point that we can enjoy virtual “face-time”: one thing is to hear the voice of a loved one and another is to be able to talk to our loved ones and see them at the same time, especially in times of global health crisis such as these. Hearing the voice of a loved one is reassuring but seeing him or her is almost therapeutic: it touches us intimately.

On this Easter day, we hear the story of Mary Magdalene and the other Mary going to see the tomb. The crucifixion of Jesus was an indisputable fact, which the disciples, including these two ladies, have learned to accept and grieve about. For them, there was nothing else to be seen but a sealed tomb blocking life outside with a massive stone.

They were expecting to encounter reality the way a rational mind would see it... unless an earthquake would happen, and logic would be totally upended. And, wouldn’t you guess it, the earthquake does happen. At this point, they see an angel, the stone removed and set aside, and the guards frozen in place and shaking in fear. What happened to the two ladies must have been totally surreal.

They now see a scene totally unexpected and probably as overwhelming and frightening as it was for the soldiers. But they, and not the soldiers, were invited not to fear but to see with new eyes what, or better “who” was *not* in the tomb. Fear is a response unbelievers usually have.

The angel is commanding them to reject their current state of fear, for his news brings great joy[[1]](#footnote-1): “I know that you are looking for Jesus the crucified one. He is not here, for he was raised just as he said.” The resurrection has already happened. The stone has been rolled away not to let Jesus out, but to let the witnesses in. And fear cannot handle that!

The angel sends the women quickly and with no hesitation to the rest of the disciples to announce to them a three-fold message: that Jesus has been raised from the dead, that they need to go to Galilee, and that they will see him there. This message seems to be so important to Matthew that he has now the risen Jesus himself appear to the two Marys and give them the same command: "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." (Mt. 28:10)

Why this insistence on going to Galilee? Why couldn’t Jesus be seen anywhere else now that he is free of his physical boundaries?

There must be a strategy in Jesus’ command to go to Galilee and see him there. Galilee is where it all began. It’s the familiar place where an inner transformation has initiated the disciples on their journey of faith. It’s where they have learned to trust Jesus and to see God with new eyes, the first elements of faith.

In Galilee, they heard the good news of God-with-us, seen miracles happen, and people’s broken spirits renewed, reconciled, and restored to community life. There, in Galilee, they had seen their hopes crushed and their Master and Lord crucified. They need to go back to Galilee where they saw human sinfulness deal a humiliating lethal blow to the Messenger of God and now witness the incredible transformation that resurrection can offer.

After noticing that the soldiers were shaken by terror, the first words both the angel and Jesus speak to the women are “Don’t *you* fear.” The disciples are to let go of fear and approach life with new eyes of faith because Jesus will be there before they arrive. Resurrection life is not imposed on us. It is offered. We are invited into it. We are invited to trust that he is already there ahead of us.

From this side of the veil, we only see evil, corruption, destruction, and death. But the veil has been torn in two (Matthew 27:51) and now we can see that God was always ready from the other side to stretch God’s hands towards us (Isaiah 65:1-3a).

Fear has no place in a disciples’ life for it tends to separate and prevent love to flow freely. And where there is no love there is no God. As an ancient hymn proclaims, where charity and love prevail, there is God[[2]](#footnote-2). Fear obscures the presence of God. For this reason, the women were commanded not to fear but to go and announce Jesus’ resurrection to the other disciples.

That first Easter, the disciples had no clue that after Good Friday the world would explode with new life[[3]](#footnote-3). To them, the challenge was simply to adjust to the new normal, to accept the reality that if you want a resemblance of control on life, you must bow your head, renounce your values, discard the idea of the Kingdom of God as a utopian delusion, and just lock yourself up in fear, wouldn’t you, please? If you were smart, you would move with the flow, and possibly associate with the most powerful or at least with those who speak the loudest. Just, don’t make any waves. If you see any evil, just look the other way.

But with the resurrection, the disciples’ world, indeed the history of the whole world, has been rocked and got turned upside down. For some reason, we focus on the negative signs all around us and examples of evil and death come readily to mind. That’s when we feel confounded and see no reason to go on. And that’s exactly when we need to be reminded and sometimes even ordered not to focus on fear. God has shown enough historical authority to order us to stop worrying. As Fr. Richard Rohr said, “If our truth does not set us free, it is not truth at all. If God cannot be rested in, God must not be much of a God. If God is not joy, then what has created the sunrise and sunset?”[[4]](#footnote-4)

Fear is not an option: while still overwhelmed in the face of their inability to control the course of life; while still groaning under the injustice done to their Lord and watching him suffer in pain; while still disoriented by the cruelty they have witnessed and by their own guilt and shame at not speaking up on their Master’s behalf, the risen Lord wants them in Galilee.

They need to return to where it all began. They need to return to their lives, they need to restore and reassert their presence in the world, not as it used to be but with new significance and purpose.

When “our life is hidden with Christ in God” we seek the things of above wanting to please God, following God’s way. God is at work in the world giving life to all who seek God’s face.

Do we agree with Peter that “God shows no partiality, but in every nation, anyone who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to God”? Our fearless life becomes, then, a joyful discovery of God’s presence in all corners of the world, saying all the time: “Look, there he is!”

Jesus’ command to the women becomes a command to all of us: Stop being afraid! God has defeated death. Rejoice, and share the good news!

1. The gospel of Luke includes the same concept, this time talking about Jesus’ birth (Lk. 2:9-10) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ELW 359 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Actually, Jesus’ prediction of his death and resurrection was announced to the disciple several times (Mt 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. R. Rohr, Daily Meditation, Monday, April 7, 2020, “My yoke is easy and my burden light.” (Matthew 11:28) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)