

March 27, 2016
EASTER 9:00

RISEN AND ALIVE

Matthew 28:1-10

Guards had been posted. The stone before the opening of the tomb had been sealed. Jesus was dead and buried. No one was going to steal His Body. No one. Period.

Suddenly... Suddenly... **Suddenly**... *“there was a great earthquake.”* (28:2) Just as the sun began to rise... just as it was beginning to be bright enough to see clearly, *“an angel of the Lord descended from heaven came and rolled back the stone... and sat on it! His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow!”* (v. 2b-3)

The two Marys saw it. The guards saw it too. It terrified *them* so much that, for a while, they became catatonic! Unable to respond. Unable to move. Unable to think. They fell to the ground. It doesn't say much for them, hardened soldiers that they were, that they fainted dead away. But... in their defense, it *was* something supernatural that was happening. It might be enough to endure the terror of an earthquake, and this was *“a great earthquake!”* But then to see the glory of God in the presence of an angel... well, they were completely freaked out!

They probably knew why they were posted at the tomb. The Chief Priests and the Pharisees had told Pilate, *“Sir, we remember what that imposter said while He was still alive. ‘After three days I will rise again!’ Therefore, we command the tomb to be made secure until the third day!”* (27:63-54) The guards would have known this. It would be eerie to keep vigil through the night near any grave, let alone to guard one that held a man who said He'd rise again. And their nerves might have been on edge thinking that His followers might come to break in and steal the Body! Any unexpected noise would have made them jump, would have set them off – battle-ready, heart-pounding, adrenalin-pumping, sword-wielding soldiers that they were. They fainted dead away... *“became like dead men.”* (v. 4)

The women lived through the same earthquake and the same experience of the angel's divine brilliance, but they reacted very differently. Perhaps because the angel was more in tune with them, they were as comforted by its presence as they were in fear and awe. And of course, the angel did say to them, *“Do not be afraid...”* In Matthew there is no condescending question such as *“Why are you looking for the living among the dead?”* as in Luke's story. (24:5)

Matthew's version is very friendly. The one angel is downright hospitable, welcoming the women to *“Come, see the place where He lay.”* But the angel then tells them to *“Go quickly.... Tell the Disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead,’ and indeed, He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him!”*

Now, Galilee was all they could think about! They would see Jesus again, Resurrected, alive! They had to hurry and tell the others. They were feeling both *“fear and great joy!”* How awesome! How wonderful! How glorious! They began to run. Then....

Suddenly.... Suddenly.... **Suddenly**.... Jesus met them, and said, *“Greetings!”* Instantly they recognized Him. (28:9) What a sweet moment! How wonderful! It was pure worship. It reminds us that, inasmuch as we are commanded to worship, we are being invited to fall before Jesus, to grab ahold of His feet, to lavish upon Him our love. Yes... *commanded* to worship – The Fourth Commandment:

“Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy.” Remember that there is a moment, a slice of time, when God expects us to enter into His holiness. That was what left the guards catatonic – they couldn’t bear the presence of holiness.

The moment of Christ’s Resurrection was so perfectly holy that even the earth rattled. We need to remember that the Resurrection is real, and it’s real in our lives. The Christian faith can still rattle the world. But, only because that moment is still working in the lives of believers. Because Christ is risen, we can rise. Because Christ is alive, we are alive... alive and going. We may not be going to Galilee to see the Risen Lord. We are His Body... risen and alive, proving His Presence, filled with His Spirit, alive with His grace – inspired. Hoping to do what Jesus did, hoping to be what Jesus is. *“Do not be afraid... Go and tell.”* (28:8)

I think we’ve got the do-not-be-afraid part down. We’ve still got a lot of telling to do though. Go, and tell others where they can find Christ. Let them see His Spirit at work in your life. He is risen and alive in you and me! Believe it! Let Him live! Amen.