

He Is Not Here, He Has Risen, Just as He Said.

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Easter Sunday, 2026 / Matthew 28:1–10
St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Sedona, AZ

Opening Versicle:

Alleluia, Christ is Risen!
Christ is Risen indeed! Alleluia!

Introduction:

A few years ago, researchers at the University of California, Irvine, published a survey of more than 5,000 Americans that was conducted during the first six months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

What they found surprised them.
People weren't just anxious or lonely.
Something more disorienting was happening.

More than sixty-five percent of their sample reported what psychiatric literature calls 'temporal disintegration' — a breakdown in the felt sense that the past, present, and future are connected. Days blurred together. Plans dissolved. And the future stopped feeling like a real place people were moving toward. The lead researcher, Dr. E. Alison Holman, described it plainly:

“People lose track of time when the future is in question. The continuity from the past to the future is gone.”

That is a clinical description of something I suspect many of us know to some degree from the inside. Not just from the pandemic, but from everything that has accumulated since — the relentless news, the divisions that seem to deepen, the low-grade grief that has settled into so many lives. The world feels heavier than it did. And sometimes, even those of us who profess a resurrection faith find ourselves living as though the stone is still in place. As though the future is still sealed.

In this morning's Gospel from Matthew, the two Marys who walked to that tomb before sunrise knew that feeling with great clarity.
They had watched Jesus die. They had watched the stone roll into place.
They had watched the guards take their positions.
And on the first day of the week, they came back — not with a plan, not with hope exactly, but because grief pulls us to the last place we saw what we loved. They came to look.

What happened next is what we are here to proclaim.

Part I: The Guards on the Ground

Matthew's account opens with an earthquake.

An angel descends like lightning, rolls back the stone, and sits on it.

And the guards — the professional soldiers posted by Rome to make sure this story stayed finished — they shake and fall down like dead men.

It is one of Matthew's quiet ironies: the men assigned to guard death become, in that moment, are the ones who look like they've died.

The ones who were supposed to keep the future sealed are the ones paralyzed by it opening. This is the image that St. John Chrysostom — whose famous Easter Sermon I shared last night — reaches for when he writes about the resurrection.

Chrysostom, preaching around the year 400 in Constantinople, says that when Christ descended into the grave, Hell itself was undone from the inside.

In that famous sermon, Chrysostom uses an extraordinary metaphor.

He says, "Hell was embittered."

Like something that bites into food and is poisoned by what it swallows.

"Hell took a body," he writes, "and met God face to face. It took earth, and encountered Heaven."

The power that was supposed to have the last word was overthrown by the very thing it thought it had consumed.

Matthew is telling the same story in the language of a garden before sunrise.

The stone is not just moved. The entire logic of sealed stones has been overturned.

And to the women standing there — afraid, bewildered, not yet able to fully process what they are seeing — the angel's first word is not an explanation.

Rather, it is a simple caring greeting.

It is simply: 'Do not be afraid.' Which means, of course, that they were afraid.

Fear does not disappear in the presence of resurrection.

Matthew makes this explicit a few verses later, in a phrase I want us to sit with: the women left the tomb 'afraid yet filled with joy.'

Both things are fully present at the same time.

That is the honest emotional texture of this moment — and,

I would argue, the honest emotional texture of Christian faith.

Part II: He Is Not Here

The angel's words to the women contain three movements. I'd like to look at each of these.

First: 'He is not here.'

The place where you came to mourn is empty.

The tomb that was supposed to be the end of the story is not where the story ended.

This is not just information about a missing body.

It is a declaration that every power which tries to seal the future — to say this is where love loses, this is where transformation ends, this is where death wins — does not have the authority it claims.

We know those powers.

We encounter them in systems that crush people and call it order.

We encounter them in our own interior lives: the old wounds we've decided will never heal, the parts of ourselves we've entombed and told ourselves are just permanently who we are.

The parts of our life we've quietly given up on.

The relationships we've written off.

The futures we've stopped believing in.

To all of those, the angel's word comes:

He is not there. The place where you went to grieve the end — is not where the story ends.

Second: 'He has risen, just as he said.' Just as he said.

Matthew's Gospel has been building to this phrase.

Three times in the preceding chapters, Jesus has told his disciples explicitly what would happen — that he would be handed over, killed, and on the third day raised.

Three times, they did not understand or could not hold it.

And now the angel points back to those promises: just as he said.

The resurrection is not a surprise ending.

It is the fulfillment of a word that was always true, even when no one could see how it could possibly be.

There is care and concern in that phrase for people living through seasons when God's promises feel abstract or inaccessible.

The women came to the tomb with no expectation of what they would find.

And yet: just as he said. The word held, his promise was true, even if it could not be fully understood.

Third: 'Go quickly and tell.'

The empty tomb is not a destination.

It is a commission.

The resurrection is not primarily an event to be commemorated — it is a direction of travel. And the direction is: go. Go to Galilee.

Part III: Going Ahead of You Into Galilee

This command brings us to the most important line in this passage:

‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’

Into Galilee. Not ‘gather in Jerusalem and wait for a visitation.’

Into Galilee — which was home.

Which was the ordinary world.

The fishing boats, the dirt roads, the crowded markets, the tax collectors, the sick people, the children. Galilee was not the holy place. Galilee was ordinary real life.

The risen Christ does not stay in sacred space, available only to those who make the pilgrimage. He is already ahead of us, moving into the texture of ordinary life, and he will meet us there. This is one of Matthew’s great insistences — the thread that runs from the Sermon on the Mount to the Great Commission at the end of the Gospel.

The kingdom is not a retreat from the world. It is the transformation of it.

And then, on the road, before the women even reach the disciples, Jesus meets them himself. Not in the temple. Not in a vision. On the road, in the going, in the in-between.

His first word to them is *chairete*, which is rendered as ‘Greetings,’ but which is better translated as ‘Rejoice.’ His first resurrection word to human beings, in Matthew’s Gospel, is joy. They fall at his feet. They worship him. And he says it a second time: ‘Do not be afraid. Go.’ -- Go. You have somewhere to go. The future is real again!

Part IV: Afraid Yet Filled With Joy — Baptism

As we move toward the renewal of our baptismal covenant, the phrase ‘afraid yet filled with joy’ is important to us as a people who have already passed through death and into life through Baptism.

Paul tells us in [Romans 6](#) that in baptism we are buried with Christ and raised with him.

Every baptism is a miniature Easter.

The stone has already been rolled away for you.

The angel has already, in some sense, spoken your name.

But — and this is what I think we most often miss — baptism is not a status. It is a vocation.

It is not a certificate. It is a direction of travel.

To be baptized, resurrection for us, means we are a people who go ahead into Galilee.

Into the ordinary. Into the world.

Into the places where stones are still being rolled in front of things,
and we are the ones called to say: He is not there. The story is not over.

In a moment defined by temporal disintegration — by the quiet loss of a believable future that so many people are carrying — the baptized community is called to be a living argument for hope. Not optimism, which is a temperament. Hope, which is a conviction grounded in an empty tomb.

Chrysostom throws the doors open in his homily — and this is what I most want us to hear. He says: it doesn't matter if you fasted perfectly or barely at all. It doesn't matter if you've been at this from the first hour or if you only arrived at the eleventh. The Lord receives the last even as the first. The table is full. Come in.

That is the shape of the community we are re-committing ourselves to when we renew these promises. A community where the calculus of scarcity and fear and sealed futures does not get the last word. Where we show up for people who have stopped believing in their own futures. Where we refuse to let cynicism settle into our shared life. Where we remain present in a world, which is easier to numb ourselves against.

Matthew does not pretend this is easy.
The women ran from the tomb afraid.
They ran toward Galilee anyway.
Both things were true at once, and both things had to be true for the story to go forward.
Faith is not the absence of the fear. It is the willingness to run in the right direction while you're still shaking.

Chrysostom again: Let no one fear death,
for the Savior's death has set us free.
Let no one weep for their iniquities, for pardon has shone forth from the grave.
That is what we are saying yes to today, when we renew our covenant.

Conclusion

As we conclude this meditation on Matthew's gospel, the guards are on the ground.
The stone has been moved.
The angel is sitting on it — which is Matthew's way of saying that the power of death has been repurposed into a seat for the messengers of life.

Chrysostom asks:
O Death, where is your sting?
O Hell, where is your victory?
Christ is risen, and not one dead remains in the grave.

And into the place where you feared the story was over,
the risen Christ walks out — ahead of you — into your Galilee.
Into your week.
Into your ordinary life, your unfinished business, your grief,
your stubborn and battered hope.
He was already there before you arrived.

He has risen, just as he said.

Do not be afraid! GO!

Amen.