

A 2014 Matthew 28:1-10 Easter worship
14-04-20 Resurrection of Our Lord, regular services

God's beloved people, grace and peace to you in the name of our crucified and risen Savior,
Jesus Christ..... Amen.....

“The tomb is empty, the earth is full.” The tomb was empty... but Mary Magdalene and the other Mary didn't **know** THAT, as they trudged along the path to the tomb. They were going to see the last place where they had seen their Lord - a couple of days before Joseph of Arimathea had carefully wrapped Jesus' broken, cross-worn body in a linen cloth and placed it in that tomb.

This morning they wanted to take up their vigil, just like we visit the graves of our loved ones. But when they arrived an earthquake and an angel changed everything. The angel earthquaked the stone away from the tomb and sat on it for good measure.

“The tomb is empty, the earth is full.” As if the earthquake wasn't enough, the angel looked like lightning. The guards standing there were quaking in fear until they were overcome to the point of being like dead men. (the only death the Marys found that morning!)

We who live in earthquake country know that part of what earthquakes do is create change. Earthquakes reshape the landscape and sometimes bring great violence and disaster. Disaster only because in God's ongoing work of creation, the earth moving causes us and our structures to move as well when we really don't want to.

Israel is in an earthquake zone; the formation of the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea happened because the two plates that slide beneath the Jordan river came apart widely enough in places for the water to pool.

So the Marys knew the power of the land moving, and when they arrived at the tomb, they found their lives moved. Their earthquake jolted them from a simple meditation and grieving time,... to a direct, divine conversation. The women went to the tomb expecting only to find death after witnessing the great violence of crucifixion several days before,... but what they found was the absence of death and the promise of life!

After all that Jesus had endured, even the Roman guard couldn't prevent God from raising Jesus from the dead. Despite the efforts of the religious and political authorities, the tomb is empty, and the earth is full.

When the angel finally speaks he speaks a promise to the women, “Do not be afraid.”... Angels must know they're out of the ordinary so they come with a calming word. “Be not afraid” isn't a command. The angel wasn't demanding that the women pull themselves together. “Be not afraid...” is a promise that what's coming isn't going to hurt them. They are safe. “I know you're looking for Jesus who was crucified, but he is not here. He has been raised.”

To this day, the only thing that you will see, if you make the trip to the garden in Jerusalem and bend down to look into the tomb of Jesus, is a sign – printed in English – saying, “...he is not here. He has been raised.”

These are earthquake words! They change everything. They mean that Jesus is no longer confined to the tomb... Jesus has been released on the world! Which is the best news that we could hear, because let's face it, the world can be a scary place and there are times that we are **very** afraid, maybe even times when we are as afraid as the guards.

We encounter all manner of earth shaking events, some of them accompanied by terrifying violence. As much as we would like for life to be all calm, shiny, and bright

accompanied by angels moving things out of our way, the reality is that we live in a world where we will see the shaky, dark side of life where people have real hurts and fears and where real violence threatens and sometimes happens.

It may be cliché to say it, but we see real hurts and violence on the news, and we read about tragedy on twitter and other outlets. We sit with friends over coffee, or we mourn with them from a distance over Facebook, wishing that we could sit close and talk.

And then there are the fears that we come up against ourselves – those things that only we know about, that we can't quite get ourselves to share with anyone. Sometimes, we can't even admit or share our fears with God.

All manner of fears cause us to feel the full weight of the tomb, the darkness of the night, the slow walk of the women, the standing-shaking deathlike-ness of the soldiers.

But the tomb is empty... the tomb is empty... Jesus is risen and he fills the earth with the message, "Be not afraid!" Three days ago Jesus faced death which is one of humanity's biggest fears. On that cross Jesus took into himself all the fear and pain of the world. What you experience as fear and pain and loneliness on your worst day, Jesus has experienced, and he has chosen to go into the most painful parts of your heart.

To BE with you in those places, and to promise you that the tomb of fear and pain has been thrown open. To assure you and the world, that fear and pain and death do NOT have the last word in God's kingdom. Jesus has the last word...Jesus has earned the last word..., and that word is "Be not afraid!" You are not alone. Jesus is with you – Emmanuel.

This is the source of the great joy that the Marys felt. And Jesus' promise of life is your invisible source of joy. You live an empty-tomb-life, the **fantastic emptiness** of the tomb. You and the Marys and all of us, move out into the world at the invitation of our Lord to carry his presence and love to everyone. Be not afraid; you are safe in Christ. The tomb is empty, and the earth is full.

Amen.....