Go and Tell—Mt 28:1-10

We need to remember that many people saw Jesus die. Many people saw Jesus dead. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were among those who saw, who witnessed Jesus’ death. The disciples knew and trusted these women. There was no mistaking that he was dead. Those two women, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, also watched as Jesus was placed in the tomb. They knew for a fact that it was Jesus in that tomb, dead. They could testify to that.

When they went to the tomb early that morning, this morning, they were expecting to mourn, to weep and grieve, and to do what they could to honor the deceased. They were expecting a little harassment from the bored guards. They were expecting to rejoin the disciples later that day, to be together in sorrow, disarray, feeling lonely and lost.

They were not expecting an earthquake. They were not expecting the foundations of their world to be shaken. That earthquake was not only the sign of the power of God’s messenger, God’s angel: that earthquake was God’s power applied to that stone. No one could see the truth because of the hard, heavy fact of that stone, that gigantic period, putting a supposedly final punctuation mark at the end of the life of Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee. That stone had to be rolled away. That earthquake is power and also revelation. When the angel reveals to the women that the tomb is empty, their world is thrown off balance.

What they had been taught and had known about true and false is overthrown: it was true beyond doubt, true beyond question to those women that Jesus was dead and was in the tomb . . . until God’s power showed them otherwise.

God, through this messenger, this angel, confronts Mary Magdalene and the other Mary with something most amazing, most disturbing: their beloved Jesus, whom they knew to be dead and in that tomb, was not in that tomb.

Later, stories would be circulated by the officials that the disciples had come in the night and taken away the body of Jesus, so that his followers could then con the gullible masses into thinking that Jesus must have risen from the dead. That theory still satisfies many who doubt, many who don’t believe, many who think all that we’re doing here today, and every Sunday, is sort of a sham, a big self-deception and pointless. You know people who think that way, even if they’re too polite to make an issue out of it.

If they are ever going to be convinced otherwise, convinced that Jesus truly was raised, that death could not hold the Son of God in its chains, it’s going to take a revelation; it’s going to take a messenger from God: a messenger with a message that will overturn the foundations of the world of those who do not believe. To begin to believe the truth that Jesus was raised by the power of God is to begin to disbelieve the lies of this world: the social lies, the cultural lies, the economic lies, the moral lies.

That stone closing the tomb was the world’s punctuation mark, its period at the end of the life of Jesus. That angel sitting atop the rolled-away stone is God’s exclamation mark, proclaiming that Jesus is alive! If Jesus is alive, then God’s Word is alive, and Jesus truly has told us the truth. If Jesus is alive, then God’s kingdom really is established and growing in the world.

How will the angel, God’s messenger, address those women? There’s at least a brief moment when that is not clear: maybe the angel will chide the women for their earthly thinking, for their lack of faith in what Jesus had been telling them all along. The angel, instead, speaks gentle words of encouragement to them, simply and plainly. And that is God’s way, my friends. God’s Word is gentleness, encouragement, and hope for us, and God’s Word comes to us simply and plainly, just like the words of that angel.

The angel provides the explanation of the empty tomb. God’s revelation, through the Holy Spirit, still provides the explanation. The Holy Spirit creates faith, and it is through that faith that we accept not only the words of that angel sent from God, but also the testimony of Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, who told the disciples. It’s through faith that we accept the testimony of the apostles, of St. Matthew, for example, who recorded these events. It’s through faith that we accept the testimony of Jesus, who told us even beforehand, several times, that all this would happen.

God doesn’t beat anybody over the head with the Good News, and neither should we. God knows the power of His Word, and asks us to have faith in the power of His Word. The Resurrection is a most glorious reminder for us that God’s Word cannot be killed, cannot be silenced, is full of holy power, life power. We humans have abundantly demonstrated how talented we are at causing death; only God can create life. Only God can give life. The world cannot take away the life that God gives: life in Christ. That’s part of what the empty tomb means.

Those women came expecting to be near the dead body of Jesus who was crucified. But they will not find Jesus who was crucified. Jesus who was crucified is nowhere to be found. How excited archaeologists would be, how triumphant all the doubters and scoffers would feel, if some box for bones were unearthed some day that bore the inscription, “herein lie the bones of Jesus of Nazareth in Galilee.” The angel has already told us that will never be. No one will ever find Jesus who was crucified, for he is nowhere to be found. The angel tells the women this: “he is not here.”

The angel tells them why, “for he has been raised, as he said.” Now, the angel isn’t expecting the women to rely solely upon his own testimony, what he has just told them, even though that would be pretty convincing testimony—

except for all the doubters and scoffers, who will never accept stories about angels and messengers and empty tombs and life power until God sends a holy messenger into their lives. The angel asks the women to see for themselves. When others hear our testimony, the testimony of people who, except for this one crazy story, seem to be in their right minds, to be trustworthy, those others might begin to wonder whether the crazy story they are hearing is so crazy after all. Maybe, just maybe, there’s some truth in it.

The angel asks the women to see for themselves and then to go and tell. So the angel is not telling the women to say to everyone, “this is what an angel told me!” That messenger from God is telling the women to go and tell others what they themselves have seen, seen with their own eyes, experienced for themselves.

Little did those women expect, as they left the tomb quickly, that they would have even more proof of God’s grace, God’s power, and God’s glory. Did you catch how Matthew described the emotional state of the women as they left the tomb? “They left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy.” Matthew doesn’t add any adjective to “fear”: it is not great fear, or terrible fear; it is not paralyzing fear or overwhelming fear. They go in some fear, then, and that’s natural, especially considering the nature of the message they’ve been asked to share. Have you ever been just a little afraid, a little reluctant and intimidated, to share the Good News with someone?

Notice, though, that when Matthew does use an adjective, he adds it to joy: the women go in fear and “great joy.” Yes, there is fear, but there is also joy, great joy: the joy is greater than the fear. That’s the power of God in our lives, my friends. There is very much in this life, in this world, that causes us to fear, but the message God entrusts to us, the Word He has given us, is always a cause of great joy, a source of great joy, a source of great, surprising joy.

Like those women hurrying from the tomb, we encounter Jesus, too, unexpectedly, amazingly, wonderfully. If you’re looking for Jesus who was crucified, you won’t find him. If you’re looking for Jesus who was raised, as he said, he will come to you. When Jesus appears to the women, he does not dazzle them with a brilliant appearance and robes gleaming white, like the angel. As he first came to them, so he comes to them now. He first came in humility, in gentleness, in love and in peace, and so he comes now. Jesus does not come to knock us down with his majesty, his authority, or his heavenly brilliance—though certainly he could, and certainly, as we encounter Christ, we can feel as though we’ve been toppled, as though our lives have been turned on their heads. Christ comes to us simply, plainly, with kindness, with love, with truth, and with grace.

And the message God spoke to those women through His angel is the very message Jesus speaks to the women: “do not be afraid”—in Christ, our cause for joy is always greater than the fear we may feel; “go and tell”—

Christ gives us a message. What is that message? God wins. Love wins. Grace wins. In Christ, we have life. Through Christ, we can share life, with everyone, believers and doubters, the faithful and the scoffers, those near to God and those very far indeed from God. With Christ, we will enjoy life, forever. The Resurrection is a fulfilled promise. Resurrection is a promise being fulfilled, fulfilled in Christ in the Church, fulfilled in you. Resurrection is a promise held out to others, in Christ through the Church, through you.

Offer that message. Offer it to everyone, boldly, disregarding the fear, embracing the great joy of Jesus Christ, risen today: God’s unstoppable, victorious Word of Life.

To the God of all grace, who calls you to share God’s eternal glory in union with Christ, be the power forever!