

# Instead of Me

Message #7 – “Alive in Me”  
Matthew 28:1-10

St. Paul’s United Methodist Church of Elizabethtown  
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*After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. <sup>2</sup> And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. <sup>3</sup> His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. <sup>4</sup> For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. <sup>5</sup> But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. <sup>6</sup> He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. <sup>7</sup> Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message for you.” <sup>8</sup> So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. <sup>9</sup> Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. <sup>10</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.” **(Matthew 28:1-10)***

“Do not be afraid.”

The angel said it to the women the first time. Then Jesus said it.

It’s certainly understandable that they *would* be afraid, right? I mean, it was barely sunrise—so it was still on the dark side of the morning. And they were in a *cemetery*, after all. And then there was that “great earthquake” that shook them out of their skin. Oh, and there was an angel of the Lord descending from heaven who then rolled back the huge stone that sealed Jesus’s grave—so, there’s *that*. And, of course, there was the strong, fully armored guard of soldiers that were now shaking from fear so badly they became “like dead men,” catatonic.

Why would they *not* be afraid, right? But the angel insisted – “do not be afraid.”

I wonder . . . what compelled Mary Magdalene and “the other Mary” to go to the cemetery, in the first place?

Let’s remind ourselves of what had happened after Jesus had died on the cross. This is what it says in the Gospel of Mark 15:42-47 . . .

*<sup>42</sup> When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, <sup>43</sup> Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of*

*the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. <sup>44</sup> Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. <sup>45</sup> When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. <sup>46</sup> Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. <sup>47</sup> Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus saw where the body was laid.*

You know, according to John's Gospel, just before He died, Jesus had said, "*It is finished*" (**John 19:30**). Bible scholars over the years have argued that what He meant by that was that in Jesus's death, all of the power of sin has now been conquered. God's divine plan for the salvation of humanity was, in that moment, fulfilled. The entire plan that God had in mind for His people from the opening chapters of the Old Testament book of Genesis on . . . in that moment on the cross of Christ . . . had reached its ultimate climax.

"*It is finished,*" Jesus had said. And it was. The price was paid. The battle was won. Victory was declared.

But Jesus was now dead. The remaining eleven disciples had scattered in fear. And for all intents and purposes, all of their hope was dead too.

Yet, once the Sabbath was over—in fact, immediately when the Sabbath was over – Mary Magdalene still goes to the tomb . . . along with the "other Mary." They had seen where Joseph of Arimathea (and probably Nicodemus too) had taken Jesus's body. They knew where to go.

Matthew 28:1 says, "*After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary **went to see the tomb.***"

Notice something here: In Matthew's account, these women don't go to the tomb to anoint Jesus's body for burial. Unlike Mark or Luke, Matthew does *not* say that they brought spices with them to prepare His body (cf. Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1). Matthew says that they just go to the tomb. It says they "**went to see** the tomb."

Anybody who has ever lost a loved one knows why they went to the tomb, right?

So, this past week, Kristine and I decided that we wanted to purchase our own cemetery plots. No . . . to our knowledge we're not planning to die anytime soon. And in spite of me talking about *The Godfather* in last week's message, I don't believe that she is making plans to have me bumped off . . . or . . . at least, I don't *think* so. ☺ We just began to realize that we wanted to have those arrangements made in advance so that in the moments of our grief, our surviving spouse would not have to make major decisions while emotionally challenged. So, I called one of my funeral director friends and began to do research. He told me that in some cemeteries they actually have different *levels* of plots.

This is how he described them: You have your basic plot in the older section of the cemetery that you can get for \$200 per person. For \$350 per person, you can get a Valley View plot. Or you can be laid to rest in the Garden of Peace for \$375 per person. And then there was the Sunset View for \$675 per person.

He was being serious, but I started laughing out loud. Finally, he said, "what's so funny?" So, I said, "Well, what you're telling me is that it'll be more expensive for me if I want *a tomb with a view!*"

Cemeteries, tombs, memorials . . . they give us a place to go to remember those that we loved. They give us a place to go when we're looking for comfort . . . when we're looking for hope.

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary . . . **What were *they* looking for?**

It seems to me that their grief drew them to the tomb. In death, even as in life, **they wanted to be where Jesus was.**

Jesus's death on the cross established a clear ending. It changed everything. Every-thing.

Have you ever felt that way? That the death of someone shut down your future? That the loss you experienced – no matter what that loss was – that it somehow robbed you of your dreams, your hopes . . . maybe even your breath? Or given what we've been through this past year, have you ever felt like the death of a dream made you feel even more isolated than you were when the quarantine began?

Have you ever felt as if hope itself died?

But if we've learned anything from the stories of Jesus, we know that **endings always lead to new beginnings.** We just don't always know what we're looking for. What are *you* looking for?

Today, we're celebrating Easter. While rabbits bringing baskets of candy is fun; and hunting for brightly colored Easter eggs brings out the kid in all of us (along with our competitive edge), Easter is really about facing into what death threatens to take away from us -- and discovering that because of what Jesus did for us on the cross, we are forever changed. God's love changes everything . . .

. . . because **God's love changes us.**

And here's the deal: In the words of a good friend of mine from seminary, "**If we don't change, nothing else will.**"

Yes, much of the world is still stuck in darkness. This past year revealed that to us yet again. There's still a lot of hatred out there, a lot of polarizing animosity, a lot

of random violence, a lot of spontaneous outbursts of evil. There are still people out there that are hurting – who are so overwhelmed by darkness that they inflict their pain on the innocent. In John 16, Jesus told us that in this world we will face trials and we will face sorrows (v. 33). In Matthew 24, Jesus told us that before He returns, nation will rise up against nation, and there will be famines and pestilences and earthquakes in various places (v. 7), and because of our faith in Him, we may be hated or tortured or even killed (v. 9).

But the Bible also reminds us that by His death and resurrection, **Jesus has overcome the world** (John 16:33).

So, this Easter – today – I have a question for you: **“What are you looking for?”**

Way too many of us, especially those of us in the Christian Church, way too many of us live our lives as if Jesus was still dead. Why is that?

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the cemetery to see the tomb – to be where Jesus was so that somehow being in His presence, even in His death, they somehow might be comforted. What they discovered was that Jesus was not among the dead. He had risen. He was alive.

In fact, that angel who told them not to be afraid, he was the first to announce the news. Look at verse 5 --- *“I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified . . .”*

You know, I’ve done quite a few graveside funeral services at cemeteries that were so large I didn’t exactly know where to go once I got there. I’ve literally driven around searching for where the person’s grave was located – especially when the family was not using a tent or any other markers! So, to have an angel sitting on a tombstone telling me where to go?? Wow!

So, the angel says to the women, *“I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. <sup>6</sup>He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said.”*

Notice something very important in this verse. The angel said, *“He is not here; for he has been raised, **as he said.**”* The angel is reminding these women – along with the many who would hear their retelling of this moment – that Jesus’s crucifixion and resurrection were planned from the beginning. Jesus had told them numerous times that this would happen. And that day, in that cemetery, it was all playing out just as Jesus had said it would.

Now, if *you* saw an angel descending from heaven and rolling a huge stone away from a well-sealed tomb, even if you didn’t see an alive Jesus, would you not believe that something very powerful, very supernatural, very unique was taking place?

And then they saw Jesus. He was indeed alive! And they were overcome with joy. They threw themselves down at His feet and worshipped Him. Seeing Jesus – alive – they had a strength and a power injected into them that made them come alive.

At that moment, the trajectory of their lives was forever altered. They went to the cemetery looking for comfort as they faced death and they discovered new life. They saw it with their own eyes.

Don't you want that? **What are *you* looking for?**

Well, Jesus IS alive. And He wants you to see Him – especially when you go out into the world and all you encounter is everything that's wrong. He wants you to see HIM.

Maybe instead of looking for the evidence of darkness around us, we ought to be looking for the evidence of new life, the evidence of God's goodness that's penetrating through that darkness. Perhaps if we were more aware of God's goodness all around us, we wouldn't be so surprised by grace when we see it.

In Matthew 28:6, we read that the angel says to the women, "*Come, see where his body was lying*" (NLT). The angel was inviting the women to see not the risen Jesus, but the empty tomb. It, along with an angel sitting on top of the rolled away stone, were the evidence that God was making all things new.

What evidence do you see that it's Easter?

In fact, as a follower of Jesus, how is *your life* evidence that it's Easter?

Let's pray our prayer together: **Lord, what do you need me to see, what do you need me to hear, what do you need me to know, what do you need me to do? I am your servant in Jesus's name. Amen.**