

The Good News is Alive in the World
Matthew 28:1-10
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
April 5, 2026 (Easter Sunday)
Rev. Jill Cameron Michel

I want to invite you to share a traditional Easter greeting. Many of you know this. I will say "Christ is Risen!" and you are invited to respond, "Christ is Risen, indeed!" Let's try that.

Christ is Risen!

Christ is Risen, indeed!

That is not only at the heart of the celebration of Easter, but resurrection is the central story of the Christian faith. This most holy of days is a day that is centered on the claim that life is more powerful than death, that all of the hate in this world is not stronger than God's love, that God's good news is alive in this world.

Yes, we hear that today in a story about Jesus' resurrection. Jesus, who was killed on the cross on Friday...who was put in the tomb...whose tomb, Matthew tells us, was watched over by guards...*that* Jesus, the gospels tell us, came back to life on Sunday morning.

And whether you embrace that story as proof of a bodily resurrection, whether you hear that story as a metaphor or even a wild claim of a deeply grieved people, or whether you simply have a lot of questions, there is so much about resurrection that we can claim and that is worth claiming.

After all, as professor and scholar Eugene Boring writes, "resurrection faith is not merely believing that a dead body came back to life, or that the tomb was empty on Easter morning...Resurrection faith does not arise on the basis of evidence...but on the basis of the experienced presence of the risen Christ" ("Matthew" in the New Interpreter's Bible, Volume VIII, 505).

So, we worship today to celebrate the ways that God's good news is alive in this world.

And, friends, don't we need that?

See there are so many things which incite fear and worry within us. There are wars and rumors or wars. There is division and polarization. We have watched as rights once considered deeply protected have been taken away. We have born witness as people have been taken from their homes and their workplaces. We have found ourselves asking questions that we thought came from another time or place, setting up protections, preparing for things we once thought impossible. And just when we think it can't get any worse, we wake up to the next day's headlines and realize again that the world is, sometimes literally and sometimes figuratively, on fire.

We need to be reminded that still...no matter what...God's good news is alive in this world.

And today's story reminds us that we can often turn to our ancestors for these reminders. After all, the world around Jesus was on fire as well. The Romans were in control. And that was fine as long as you lived quietly and didn't cause problems...that was fine as long as you paid your taxes even if it meant you didn't eat...that was fine as long as you took a "go along to get along" perspective. But the
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problem with that was that the values of the empire weren't values that supported the people. Rather, the rich were getting richer while the majority were lucky to simply get by. The sound bytes were written by the powers-that-be and beware if you dared to speak a different word. The lines were drawn, the groups were divided, the expectations were clear.

And do you know what Jesus' problem was? He dared to speak a different word. He dared to cross the boundaries. He dared to offer hope and possibility and love, and in doing so, he dared people to envision another way...the way of God's kin-dom rather than the earthly empire. He dared to claim that the vulnerable mattered, that compassion and justice and mercy should be centered, that loving God and loving neighbor are really meant to be our lived priorities.

And when the empire tried to silence him, the claim of Easter is that his message just wouldn't be quiet...that no matter what, the good news was still alive in the world.

And, friends, I love this story as Matthew tells it. And it's one we likely hear less frequently. Maybe it's because of the earthquake. Maybe it's because of the guards, frozen in fear. Maybe those elements confuse us and so we simply look to the other gospels.

But I love this story because here it is clear that the good news of the resurrection lives even in the midst of the hard realities of life.

The Marys go to the tomb as day dawns. They go, knowing that the tomb is sealed with a stone. Probably knowing that there are guards there. But they go. They go because they can't be anywhere else. They go because their grief draws them close even if that means close to his grave.

But when they arrive something big happens. Matthew doesn't tell us a subtle story. Rather, as Matthew tells it - there is a big event, an earth-shaking event as the angel arrives and the tomb's entrance is opened.

And not everyone's reaction is the same. While the guards fall over like dead men, the women listen. It's not that they didn't know fear...in fact, fear is mentioned again and again in this story. They knew fear, they felt fear...*and* something within them allowed them to be more than their fear.

So, they listened to the angel. The angel who told them a tale hard that was to believe...the angel who asked them to deliver a message even though women were unlikely and, too often, untrusted messengers.

But they listened and then they acted. And I love what Matthew says in verse 8: "So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to tell his disciples" (Matthew 28:8, NRSVUE).

The women knew fear. Fear was a palpable reality that morning. The guards were stunned motionless in their fear. The angel began with the words, "Do not fear." As the women headed to find the disciples, they saw Jesus and he, too, said, "Do not fear." Even as Matthew writes about their leaving this place, he acknowledges that they did it with fear...but not fear alone. Rather they went with "fear and great joy."

Maybe that's our invitation. Maybe that's how we help keep the good news alive in this world.

See, Easter doesn't deny that there are things worth fearing in this world. In fact, fear is a response that can often be informative. But it is no place for us to live.

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So the resurrection story reminds us not to let fear be all that we know.

Instead, the good news of the gospel, the good news of resurrection says...Let your fear commingle with your joy. Let your fear walk alongside new possibilities. Let your fear motivate you toward love.

Because when we are willing to see beyond our fear, then we are invited into a resurrection faith...a faith that believes beyond what is possible...a faith that risks itself for others...a faith that claims again and again that hope is alive and that love has the last word.

Rev Sarah Speed, in our Lenten devotional booklet, shared a poem called, "Birdsong." It reads this way:

"Every morning the sun rises, majestic and steady.

She is greeted in all her strength with the joyous cacophony of birdsong.

I like to believe this holy chorus is the birds telling each other -

I'm here. We made it through the night. You're not alone. What good, good news.

I think the resurrection is a bit like that.

God is here. We made it through the night. We are not alone. *What good, good news*" (Rev. Sarah Speed, "Birdsong" in *Tell Me Something Good: A Lenten Devotional*, A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org).

Friends, today we claim that we are bigger than our fear. Today we claim that God's good news is alive in this world. And today we commit to live in ways that say to others, "You are not alone...we are in this together...love is possible...you matter." May it be so.