

Texts: Matthew 28:1-10

Subject: The Resurrection

Theme: Believe, Share, Rejoice

Easter Sunday; April 21, 2019, Reformation Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV

Grace and peace to you from God our Father in heaven and from the Risen Lord Jesus Christ!

If you scroll through your online media feed as often as I do, you've seen the links. They're called 'clickbait.' They are websites trying to get your attention, and they feature a headline that says something like, "You'll never *believe* what happened next!" or "You'll never *believe* how this dog got out of this burning building!" or "You'll never *believe* who's following you!" To find out *the rest of the story* (a Paul Harvey reference for a certain generation) all you have to do is click. You'll find a website with some weak blog post or news story that's not nearly as unbelievable as they had led on, and probably some advertising for medical hair restoration, or worse. Why do we do it? What makes the clickbait so attractive? Is it that humans just want to believe amazing things? Do we long see something that's more than we can imagine? Am I just spending too much time online? Don't answer that.

This Easter morning we come to hear another story that some find completely unbelievable. Jesus, you know, the one - he healed the sick, fed thousands, brought the dead to life, and was known as the Son of God - he died on a cross. On a cross! They nailed him to it! He died there and they put him in a tomb with a big ol' rock in front. He was there three days: Friday, Saturday, Sunday. Certainly, totally, believably, dead.

Then these two women named Mary went to the tomb...and YOU'LL NEVER GUESS WHAT HAPPENED NEXT! There was an Earthquake! And an Angel! The guards went stone cold - like dead men!

The angel talked to them and told them not to be afraid! Yeah right.

He told them Jesus was...ALIVE!

The angel reminds them that Jesus told them this would happen. "He's been raised just like he said." "Come, see."

They went into the tomb?

It was generally frowned upon in those days, and probably still now, to be walking into tombs. That's for dead people. Not living people. Not these women. They were afraid. But they looked in anyway.

What they saw was beyond belief. Who would believe them? All those men who drifted away? The one who denied his friend, his Savior, the Messiah, Jesus? Judas betrayed him. His disciples, they went into hiding. They knew Jesus was dead. The one they thought was the real Messiah died like a criminal - a robber was set free instead of their King of Kings. The two women stayed close to the cross, watched him laid in the tomb, and even in their fear and grief, went there on the third day.

They believed in him. They loved him. They watched him and stayed with him. The word that we hear today might sound like too much to believe, but that's exactly what it calls each one of us to - faithfully trust in the promise that Jesus is not dead! Jesus is ALIVE, just like he said he would be. The one who was faithful unto death, fulfilling the will of God, laid down his own life and was raised to life, that you would believe he is really the Savior of the world - the first born of the new creation!

It is hard for us to believe on our own. Especially hard when we retreat into our own hiding places, our fear and grief. The world still groans in pain and tragedies seem to pile up, and there are plenty of reasons to doubt. School shootings, racism, hate

crimes, terrorism here and abroad, war overseas and violence persisting in our own cities. We suffer and we struggle to believe.

The angel gave those women a job to do. You can imagine them leaving that place, burry eyed, and shaking on their way. But they went. To go and share the news with the disciples. He's not in the tomb, but is headed to Galilee - if they wanted to see him, they would go too. They went to share the news. What news they had to tell! Could you imagine being on the receiving end of that news? Would it be welcome, or confusing? Would it seem like an idle tale? (Luke's gospel has the disciples failing to believe the women.)

We talked in our Bible study class a couple weeks ago about sharing the good news of Jesus with our neighbors. We tend to think that they need to hear this news, or assume everyone has heard it all before. We think about people in deep need, people who are hungry, homeless, alone, sick or dying. It seems that we don't start by thinking about ourselves. Maybe it's we that *need to share* the good news. And why wouldn't we? Jesus is the Son of God who has overcome death - he is no longer in a grave but living, riding with us, carrying us, standing with us to share all that we have and being good news for us ALL as we walk with those who are in need. We need that good news shared back to us too.

I had heard about Jesus my whole life. I went to church as a boy. Went every now and then as I got older. It wasn't until I was almost thirty years old that I heard the gospel and the news of Jesus liberating love reached into my heart and brain and spine and made we feel truly alive! The hair on my neck stood up! I heard it and wanted more. I wanted to know all about Jesus, all about this new life, the bible, God's grace,

forgiveness, kindness, steadfast love and generous mercy. When we share the story of Jesus, we open up the possibilities of new life for others, and the Spirit ignites a spark in our own lives of faith to draw us deeper into a life of faith, fellowship, and peace.

It might have been too much for Mary and Mary to *believe*, but then as they turned to go on their way, to faithfully carry out this mission and *share* the good news, the risen Jesus greets them! *Chariete* is the word in Greek - it means *Rejoice!* It's a common greeting, but so profound to hear it from the lips of the risen Jesus on the road with these women. It's more than happiness - it's like opening your birthday presents and finding exactly what you thought you'd never see. It's like the Vegas Golden Knights winning a Stanley Cup! It's like Earth's greatest heroes coming together and making a movie that defies all expectation. Do not be afraid - Rejoice!

Can we do that?

To know that Jesus is alive is pure joy! Imagine their shock at seeing him right there with them. They held onto him and wouldn't let go - they fell to their knees and worshipped him! They rejoiced to know it was true! They rejoiced in his presence - they could do nothing else!

Three days ago, we gathered at the foot of the cross to hear the story of Jesus' suffering a brutal death, the end of hope and the dream for a new Kingdom, a new Jerusalem, the disciples abandoning their teacher and friend, and women who waited there, in faith and grief, waiting to move forward again.

They watched. They stayed. They went to the tomb.

They believed, they shared, they rejoiced!

We are called to *believe*, even when it's hard. The Spirit helps us. We are commanded to *share* the good news, for our sake and for others. We are made to *rejoice*!

I can see Jesus standing there looking at the women, loving them, and knowing what was about to come next. The story was just beginning. and so is yours! If this Easter morning is your first, or fiftieth, or eightieth, or ninety-third, this can be a new beginning too - but cause this is Resurrection Sunday - and every Sunday a little Easter - when we hear the good news of Jesus risen from the grave. He is Alive! Everything is made new - the abundant life Jesus promises begins here and now - it's for you and you and you and me too, and all our children, and our friends, and our enemies, our grandparents, and guests, and everyone we meet.

Jesus was dead and now he's alive!

Believe, share, rejoice!

Christ is Risen!

He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!