

## The Last Word

April 12, 2020 Easter  
Year A: Matthew 28:1-10  
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**Matthew 28:1-10** <sup>1</sup>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."

*Death doesn't get the last word! God in the resurrected Christ, gets the Last Word!*

Greetings! I will greet you with the ancient Easter greeting. While I won't be able to hear you, I'm trusting that you'll respond back to me! Ready? Christ is Risen! He is risen, indeed!

God's grace and peace to you on this Easter morning! Even though we cannot be together I promise you, we are together! For today God is in the house! Your house and mine! Thanks be to the living, resurrected Christ not bound by death but very much alive! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Amen.

If you're like me, lately we've been checking in on death. Each day we check the news to see who has died. Is the death toll up in Colorado? How are the hot spots of New York and New Orleans doing? Has anyone famous died? What about people we know who have Covid-19? How are they doing?

In any other time, it might sound rather morbid. Yet right now, it's a way of life. We check in on death.

On that first Easter morning, Mary and Mary Magdalene went to go check in on death. Not expecting anything else, they want to be near the body of Jesus, to mourn and to pray. We know this feeling. It's strangely comforting to see a tombstone or to lay flowers on special occasions. We need to check in on death.

Their quiet prayers were quite suddenly interrupted by the earth shaking under their feet. An angel of God appears. The soldiers guarding the tomb are stunned with fear. Furthermore, the angel opens the tomb and shows it to the women!

The angel declares, "Do not be afraid! I know you came here looking for Jesus. He is not here – he has been raised! Go! You'll see him in Galilee!"

This pronouncement leaves the ladies simultaneously feeling fear and joy! Who wouldn't? What kind of a word was this? Certainly not expected! Jesus was dead. The last time these women saw Jesus - all life had left him as He hung on that cross.

So doing the angel's bidding, Mary and Mary Magdalene immediately start towards Galilee. But who should appear in their path? Jesus! Yes, it was Jesus and He was very much alive!

"Greetings!" He says. One word. One word that conveyed so much. The Greek translation of Jesus' 'greetings' is actually much closer to, "Be you rejoicing!"

"Greetings! Be you rejoicing! I am not dead! Do not be afraid."

The silent, fully dead Jesus, is now alive! Speaking! Death didn't get the Last Word! God in the risen Christ has the Last Word! For He is the Word – capitol W - God made flesh! The Word is Resurrection! Jesus, The Word says, "Greetings!" Be you rejoicing!"

Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed!

We've all heard many stories over the last month. We've heard heroic reports of people putting their lives on the line for others. We've heard touching anecdotes of neighborhoods coming together doing exercise classes. People gathering on balconies and front porches at 8 pm every night to applaud health care workers.

There have also been stories of separation. Adult children and families touch window panes of their parents in nursing homes. Longing to get close, but yet permanently separated by this wall of clear glass. Our hearts hurt as we read of spouses who never had a chance to say goodbye. These narratives of separation are tangible and palpable as they come to us over the news.

One account was the death of an Italian priest. His name was Father Don Giuseppe Berardelli. The 72 year old Father was cheerful, enthusiastic and would listen to anyone. He could be counted on to give help.

(<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/italian-priest-coronavirus-ventilator-don-giuseppe-berardelli/>) The story goes Father Berardelli gave up his ventilator so a younger patient would receive it. For this priest there was no separation between life and death because he knew about Easter. Father Berardelli knew about Jesus' resurrection. He was intimately acquainted with God's word and Jesus the Word made flesh. So there was no separation. In his dying Father Don gave us a lesson in living.

Imagine him as he breathed his last saying goodbye to this world and waking up in the next. I'll bet my last dollar when Jesus met him, He must have said something like, "Greetings! Be you rejoicing!"

(Preaching disclaimer...there are reports that this story is not true...but it sure works for an Easter sermon! Believe what you will!)

Death never gets the last word! For if this is all there is ....coronavirus, Covid-19, sin, death, decay and despair....if this is all there is....then God has left us in a sorry tale indeed!

But it's not! The silent Jesus left hanging bloodied upon the cross, is now alive! God gets the last Word.

He's always had the last word. Jesus said to the stormy waves, "Be still!" He said to the lame man, "Get up and walk." He said to Lazarus already dead in the tomb, "Lazarus, Come out!"

God as incarnate Word has been with humankind from the beginning. In creation. Through ancient Israel's disobedience. The Word came through the Prophets. Then Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, moved into our neighborhood – human life - and life has never been the same.

God is greater than our current fears, loss of work, shelter-at-home, this pandemic....God is stronger than all of this. To be blunt, as it says in Romans 14:8-9, "Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living." Alleluia!

Now that doesn't mean we can stop taking all these protective measures. No! It simply means, that God in the Risen Lord Jesus Christ, always gets the last word. Death does not!

On this Easter day, take hold of Jesus feet like Mary and Mary did. Hold on for dear life if you have to. But hear Jesus, say to you and to me, "Greetings! Be you rejoicing!" That is the Word... in this life and the next.

Christ is Risen! He is risen, indeed, Alleluia!

Alleluia!

Amen.