

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

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Sermon Text: Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, and John 20-21

Sermon Title: "Christ's Resurrection in Four Parts" {Easter Sunday}

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{SLIDE 1} Four different people wrote the Gospels of the New Testament. Four different witnesses tell us the story of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They come at the story from different angles. They have different ways of showing us how Christ came to be alive, and how Christ came to be our eternal Savior.

{SLIDE 2, MATTHEW 28} Let us start with the first witnesses: Matthew. His is the first gospel in the set, so we might as well start with him. The story of Christ's resurrection may be found in Chapter 28, and it tells us that Mary Magdalene and other women have shown up to the tomb. Matthew doesn't specifically tell us why they showed up; one of the other Gospels will tell us later. Anyhow, they show up: women. Not men. Funny how a society such as the one during Jesus' time put so much emphasis on the man – male power, male dominance – that the first people to witness the greatest event in world history were women. Men who were supposedly bold and strong would not be caught going out early morning to visit

the tomb of Jesus. But the women would. They had a confidence, they had a determination that put the men to shame.

These women, led by Mary Magdalene, approach the tomb, and suddenly there is an earthquake. The ground shakes not because tectonic plates are move deep beneath the soil, but because an angel of the Lord has descended from the heavens and caused the stone to be rolled away. Jesus was placed in a tomb that was more like a cave. It could have been a normal cave, or just a large hole dug in the earth. A great stone was placed before the tomb to keep people from going in, and also to keep decaying smells from escaping. Bodies do decay over time and they don't smell too good. The tomb of Jesus is unique in that the stone that covers the entrance is sealed. Matthew tells us at the end of Chapter 27 that Pontius Pilate ordered the tomb to be closed permanently after a group of Pharisees and priests requested him to do so. They worried that the disciples might come by and steal Jesus' body way, and that could be easily done if the tomb was covered with a lighter rock. So, Pilate ordered the tomb to be sealed and guards posted outside.¹

{SLIDE 3} Well, that didn't work, because an angel

¹ Cf. Matthew 27:62-66.

came shooting from the sky like a rocket and shook the entire planet so that the stone could be rolled away. The tomb is now opened, and the Roman guards cannot do anything about it. They are paralyzed with fear and act like they are dead.²

But the scene continues. The angel tells the women not to become like dead people but to look inside the tomb and see that Jesus is not there. He is no longer dead. He is alive. He has risen and he goes forward to meet everyone in a different place. After the women see inside the empty tomb, the angel implores them to go with all haste to the disciples and tell them the good news about the resurrection. They all have to make a trip up north, about 110 miles to the region of Galilee. Jesus will meet everybody there. Jesus will explain everything to them once they make the 110-mile trip.

{SLIDE 4} As the women depart, Jesus makes an appearance. He calls out to them, and the women fall in worship at his feet. He tells them not to be afraid, just the angel told them not to be afraid like dead people. “Go to Galilee,” he tells them, “and I will see you there.”³

As they move away, apparently the guards that were left for dead come back to their senses. They run

² Cf. Matthew 28:4.

³ Matthew 28:9-10.

to the chief priests to let them know that Jesus has somehow escaped. They tell about the angel and the women – maybe they actually saw Jesus talking to the women as they ran away. The story they tell is quite bizarre. It is hard to believe. So the chief priests pay the guards hush-up money. They tell the guards to forget about angel and Jesus, and just make up a story that the disciples stole the body away. If they are asked, the chief priests will cover for the guards. Nobody will get in trouble. Everybody will forget the whole thing happened.⁴

{SLIDE 5} But nobody will forget. Matthew has recorded the story about women and then disciples learning about the resurrection of our Lord. He tells about the angel rolling the stone away, about women running to the others to report, and then Jesus meeting with everybody to give them instructions on what to do next.⁵ Matthew is the only Gospel that tells about the cover-up among the chief priests and the guards. They tried to keep it a secret, but the secret got out. Jesus is alive. He is the Savior who said he would die but then rise again to new life. Through him we are dead to our sin, and through him we are made alive to celebrate eternity with God.

⁴ Cf. Matthew 28:11-15.

⁵ Cf. Matthew 28:16-20.

{SLIDE 6, MARK 16} Now Mark's account is slightly different. Mark still witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but he sees it from a different angle. Mark tells us that women show up to the tomb very early in the morning. Matthew tells us the same thing, but Mark names each one as Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome.⁶ They come with spices in their hands (Matthew didn't tell us this), because they hope to anoint Jesus' body with those spices. Mark doesn't tell us exactly what they are going to do with the spices, but any good Jew reading this Gospel would know that spices are applied to the dead in order to keep the bodies from stinking too much. As we said before, a stone is placed in front of the tomb to keep some of the stench out, but it still could escape and stink up the place. The women go to keep the smell at bay.

As the women approach the tomb, they are concerned about moving the rock away, because it would be quite heavy. As they try to come up with a plan, they soon discover that the rock is always moved away. Mark tells us that it was very large, but there it rests at the side. There is no mention of angels rocketing from the sky, as Matthew told us. No earthquake is mentioned. Roman guards aren't even

⁶ Cf. Mark 16:1

mentioned.⁷ This is still the same story about Christ's resurrection but told in a different light.

{SLIDE 7} An angel doesn't tell the women to venture into the tomb. They just go in. It is there they find someone dressed in a white robe. It seems as though he is the angel, a young man who tell the women to not be afraid. Both Matthew and Mark make sure to add the quote, "Do not be afraid," or "Do not be alarmed," for the resurrection is an alarming event. In both cases, the women were expecting to meet a closed tomb holding their beloved yet dead Savior. However, what they encounter is bizarre, alarming. What they encounter is scary, but they cannot be afraid. They must be calm. Jesus, who was crucified, is now alive. "Listen. Be calm, and tell the disciples and Peter to go to Galilee, for Jesus will meet everybody there."⁸ Women, you have a message to share. Do so with haste and even with joy.

{SLIDE 8} However, they do not go in haste. Mark tells us that they fled from the tomb in terror.⁹ They say nothing to nobody, according to Mark. For the moment, the good news of Jesus Christ is stalled.

This is quite different from Matthew's account, since he says that the women go instantly and report

⁷ Cf. Mark 16:3-4

⁸ Mark 16:6-7.

⁹ Cf. Mark 16:8.

the results of Jesus' resurrection. But in Mark there is a pause. There is concern and worry. This is still the story of Easter from a different angle. Easter shouldn't always be a time of happiness and laughter, a time to wear the brightest clothes and take the happiest of pictures. Easter should cause us to pause at some point to consider what Jesus really did for us. He died brutally for us, so that our sin would plague us no more. He rose for us, so that we would not die and end up in a terrifying place. Now that Jesus is alive, what would he have me do? How must I celebrate his new life, and how should I live out the new life I have in Christ with all obedience?

Eventually Mark will tell us in Chapter 16, verses 9-20 what the women and the disciples do in reaction to Jesus' resurrection, but at some point all believers should feel some concern, maybe some fear. Jesus being alive again is a great and awesome thing to bear.

{SLIDE 9, LUKE 24} Luke, the great physician and historian, has a story to share. His account is closer to Mark's than Matthew's. No angel shooting from the heavens and no earthquake. The stone is already rolled away, and there are no guards to be seen. The women go inside the empty tomb, and instead of

seeing one young person they see two.¹⁰ Terrified, they fall to the ground. In Luke, the angels don't tell the women not to be afraid. They ask why the women are searching for the living among the dead. The women are looking for a dead person to anoint with spices, but they will not find him. "Remember how Jesus said in Galilee that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and be raised to new life on the third day?"¹¹ In Luke's Gospel the women actually remember. It dawns on them that Jesus was right in his words, and that he must be alive somewhere. The women are named just like in Mark's Gospel, but they are Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Joanna. Salome is not mentioned in Luke, while Joanna is not mentioned in Mark. Matthew gives no names.

{SLIDE 10} Now Peter runs to the tomb after the women tell the disciples about Jesus' rising. The disciples don't believe the story. They think this is a trick or something that the women are pulling. I mean, come on, they are women. Should they be believed?

Peter believes them. He seems to be the only one. Luke tells us that he runs to the tomb to check it out for himself. He looks inside, he sees the empty burial

¹⁰ Cf. Luke 24:1-4.

¹¹ Luke 24:6-7.

clothes on the ground, and he is amazed at what just happened.¹² The Greek word here describes Peter as being in wonder about the event. He is marveling at what happened; he is completely surprised but he is also filled with awe. Jesus did it. He actually rose from the grave. His death was gruesome, but his resurrection is glorious. It makes us wonder if Peter wishes he was at the tomb at the precise time the women discovered the stone rolled away.

This is the first time in Luke that we read about Peter. Matthew and Mark do not mention him. This is the first time we read about Peter going to the empty tomb to check things out. And this is the first time we get his reaction.

{SLIDE 11} Many more reactions are coming. The women were not the only ones to have lightbulbs come on in their heads, when they remembered Jesus' words about his death and resurrection.

We encounter two men in verses 13-35 who walk to a town called Emmaus. Luke is the only one who mentions the road to Emmaus. They are wondering at how Jesus could have died and then could be raised from the dead. As they walk a strange approaches them. We are told he is Jesus, but the men do not know this. Jesus offers a mini-sermon about what the

¹² Cf. Luke 24:11-12.

Son of Man had to do for the whole universe. The men relearn the Gospel message of salvation from Jesus, although they still do not know who he is. It isn't until they stop for dinner, and Jesus takes bread and blesses it and breaks it that they realize who their traveler has been. It dawns on them, just like it dawned on the women at the empty tomb. Jesus is alive. They are as amazed as Peter was, not full of fear but full of excitement, not paralyzed by what they just learned but animated to go and tell others immediately. Matthew's Gospel seems to be interested in proving Christ's resurrection. Mark's Gospel seems to be interested in contemplating the reality of Christ's resurrection. Luke's Gospel seems to be interested in being amazed by Christ's resurrection.

Jesus will meet finally with his disciples. They are startled and terrified, since they think Jesus is a ghost. But he tells them not to be frightened, to look at his hands and feet, to touch his hands and feet, and believe he is alive. Jesus receives a piece of broiled fish and eats it, further proving that he lives.¹³ Jesus again offers a mini-sermon and tell the disciples to stay in the city. In Luke they do not go to Galilee just as they did in Matthew or Mark. They seem to stay in the city of Jerusalem, since Jesus says that from

¹³ Cf. Luke 24:36-43.

Jerusalem they will go out and be amazed witnesses to the resurrection of their Lord and Savior.¹⁴ Luke's Gospel is the only one that mentions the ascension of Jesus to heaven.¹⁵

{SLIDE 12, John 20-21} And now we have John. We said before that Matthew seems to be interested in proving Christ's resurrection, Mark seems to be interested in contemplating the reality of Christ's resurrection, and Luke seems to be interested in being amazed by Christ's resurrection. John's Gospel seems to be interested in exploring the intimate relationships Jesus had with certain people after the resurrection.

John's Gospel is long, but there aren't many stories told about Jesus like in the other Gospels. The other Gospels like to move us quickly from one event to another, and they usually illustrate several different events all in a chapter. John likes to take his time. He will use an entire chapter to tell just one story, because he wants us to understand Jesus as the compassionate One who takes time to be with us. The other Gospels take only one chapter to tell of the resurrection. John will take two chapters.

The first encounter in Chapter 20 is with Mary Magdalene. In John's Gospel she goes to the tomb

¹⁴ Cf. Luke 24:47-49.

¹⁵ Cf. Luke 24:50-53.

alone, unlike the other three Gospels.¹⁶ By herself she discovers the tomb stone has rolled away. No angel, no earthquake as in Matthew's Gospel. She doesn't run into anybody initially, so she runs off to Simon Peter and the disciples to tell them what occurred. At least Peter and John are concerned by the news, so they go running to the tomb. In Luke it is only Peter who goes, but John says that John and Peter went, and John was just a bit faster.¹⁷ Although John arrives to the tomb first he doesn't go in. Peter does go in and marvels at the sight. John also enters and marvels. It seems that they cannot make heads or tails of what happened to Jesus. They do not remember Jesus' words about resurrection. So they go home without much more thought.¹⁸

{SLIDE 13} But Mary Magdalene stays. She must stay in order to witness to Jesus' resurrection. She weeps outside the tomb for a time. When she can finally look inside she sees two angels dressed in white sitting where Jesus ought to be. Luke tells us that there were two angels present, but they talked to several women. The two angels in John only speak with Mary Magdalene, and they ask why she is weeping. She says that they (whoever they is) have

¹⁶ Cf. John 20:1.

¹⁷ Cf. John 20:2-4.

¹⁸ Cf. John 20:5-10.

taken my Lord, and the angels do not reply. In the other three Gospels the angels reply to those in distress, but in John they remain silent.¹⁹ This is because Jesus will do the talking. He happens to be standing behind Mary Magdalene. She turns to see him, but in her distress she thinks he is the gardener. Jesus also asks why she is crying, and Mary requests that this gardener should return Jesus to his proper place. “Sir, if you have carried him away, show me and I will carry him away.”²⁰

Jesus has great patience. He spends time with Mary and helps her understand. All he needs to do is say her name, “Mary,” and she immediately understands that the gardener is really Jesus. She wants to grab him but he refuses her. “Do not hold me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go and tell my brothers...”²¹ Mary is now witness to the resurrection. She is able to report good news that Peter and John couldn’t discover when they visited the empty tomb.

{SLIDE 14} Next is Thomas. We call him Doubting Thomas. Only John mentions him in his Gospel. That evening after Mary discovers that Jesus is alive, Jesus

¹⁹ Cf. John 20:11-13.

²⁰ John 20:15.

²¹ Cf. John 20:16-17.

himself visits all the disciples behind a locked door.²² The door is locked because they are in trouble of being exposed as Jesus' disciples. If they are caught, they too could be crucified. So they hide out. Jesus can walk through any barrier, so he visits the disciples in their little hideout and tells them to receive the Holy Spirit. He breathes out as he says these words.

But Thomas wasn't around for all of this. He went to the store or he went fishing or he went off to visit other disciples hiding out in another home. Who knows where he was, but he missed Jesus. He is frustrated that he missed Jesus, and will not believe that he is alive. "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands," is his famous line, "and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."²³

Jesus spends time with Thomas. A week later Jesus arrives again and he helps Thomas to believe. "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side." The picture on the screen was painted by the Italian painter Caravaggio. He illustrates the moment beautifully. We can see Thomas actually doing what Jesus told him to do. Thomas isn't being gross or too forward. Jesus is spending time with him, and he wants Thomas to

²² Cf. John 20:19-23

²³ John 20:25.

believe and have peace that his Lord is truly alive. Thomas touches and Thomas believe: “My Lord, and my God.”²⁴

{SLIDE 15} And then there is the time with Peter. We talked about Peter two Sundays ago. He messed up royally. He denied his Savior three times, saying he didn’t know him. The pain Peter felt must have been excruciating. How could he throw his friend and his Lord under the bus like that?

But Jesus comes to the side of the lake, on which Peter is fishing.²⁵ Jesus sets up a campfire, and he hopes that Peter and the other disciples will come for a bite to eat. Peter arrives first to the side of Jesus, because he jumped out of the water and swam to shore. The other disciples arrives and all can sit down for a meal.

Jesus spends time with Peter. He forgives Peter. He asks him three times if he loves him, and Peter says yes three times. Each affirmation of love cancels out each time he denied Christ. All is healed. Peter is restored as faithful disciple, and he can now be united to Christ and serve as Christ’s intrepid servant.

{SLIDE 16} This is Christ’s resurrection in four

²⁴ John 20:28.

²⁵ Cf. John 21:1-14.

parts. Each part is similar and different in its own way. Some details are mentioned in one and not mentioned in another. Yet, each Gospel testifies to the fact that Jesus is a real God dressed in real human skin, and that he died a real death for the forgiveness of our sins, and that he rose from a real tomb for our eternal salvation.

Men and women saw and believed. They told the story and many more believed after them. We too have read the four stories. We too have seen how they paint for us a broad and clear picture. We believe and receive everlasting joy from what Christ has done for creation. Jesus Christ is risen today. He has life, so that we will always have life.

The Assurance of Pardon:

Hear the good news! Who is in the position to condemn us? Only Jesus Christ is, and he died for us. Christ rose for us. Christ reigns in power for us. Christ intercedes for us. Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old life has gone; a new life has begun. Friends, believe the gospel: in Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. Amen.