

Matthew 28:1 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."

April 16, 2017  
Easter Sunday

## Jesus is On the Loose

Matthew 28:1-10

Scott Black Johnston is the senior minister of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City. He says that, sometime today, as happens every year on Easter Sunday, he will get a phone call. The voice on the line always says the same thing: "Jesus is on the loose." Then the phone goes dead. He knows the voice, knows the caller. It's his roommate from seminary sharing his unique Easter greeting.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus is, indeed, on the loose.

Rome does not have enough soldiers to restrain him.

The chief priests and Pharisees don't have enough laws to restrict him.

Satan himself cannot get a tight enough grip to hold him down.

Jesus is on the loose. He is not just risen, as though that were not enough, he is on the move.

When the two women come to the tomb on Sunday morning, they should be wearing crash helmets. As Matthew tells the story, this is no mild spring morning with birds singing and daffodils blooming. This is a ground-shaking, blood pressure spiking, sensory explosion for these poor women. An angel shines like lightning as he makes the rock sealing the tomb roll like thunder. The big, tough Roman guards shake like scared puppies before they drop to the ground, literally faint with fear.

Once the dust settles, the women see the angel sitting on the stone, smirking at the Roman soldiers passed out in a puddle of fright, then turning to them and saying, "You've got nothing to be afraid of. I know why you're here and who you're looking for, but he isn't here. He has been raised, just as he said he would. You can look in the tomb if you want. But then you need to run and tell his disciples that he is alive and on the loose. In fact, he's going ahead of you to Galilee. That's where you'll find him."

The women run to tell the disciples, and run right into Jesus himself!

"Shalom," he says. "Peace."

Again overwhelmed, they fall down at his feet and worship him while Jesus repeats the message: "Tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Where is Galilee?

Geographically speaking, it's the region around the Sea of Galilee, about 70 miles north of Jerusalem. Averaging 15 miles a day, it's about a four-day walk for Peter and the other disciples.

On a deeper level, Galilee is home.

Galilee is where Peter and Andrew, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; and, all the rest grew up to be fishermen, tax collectors, and, other types of workers.

It is home, where their wives and children have been holding down the fort while they follow Jesus around.

Galilee is where Jesus met and called his disciples to follow him.

Galilee is where they will return, now that the one they thought was the Messiah is dead and in the grave.

Galilee is comfortable, familiar, and, where you go when your hopes have been dashed to bits and there's no place else to go.

From everything we can tell, the twelve followed Jesus to Jerusalem thinking they would not be returning home. In spite of Jesus' warnings about being put to death, they seem to have believed that he had entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday in order to take over the place. Simon and Andrew want to be his first lieutenants when he comes into his kingdom. They think he's riding into Jerusalem to somehow drive out the Romans and depose the chief priests and Pharisees, and begin a new era of David-like wealth and peace.

Now, a week has passed, their hopes have been nailed to a cross and sealed in a tomb, and it is time to go home. Start over. Pick up the nets and go fishing.

Where is Galilee? About a four-day walk away from Jerusalem. A four-day walk away from hope. They'd backed the wrong Messiah and it was time to go home.

Galilee is, most importantly, **not** Jerusalem. Jerusalem is where you go to take over, to succeed, to make your big plans come true. Galilee is where you go when your plans fail and it's back to your now-

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<sup>1</sup> From the sermon, "Deadly Things" April 12, 2009 on Day1.Org. [http://day1.org/1241-deadly\\_things](http://day1.org/1241-deadly_things)

way-too-boring fishing boat job. It's hard to feel the same way about fishing when you've been so close to taking over Jerusalem.

What they don't expect is that Galilee is where Jesus – yes, the nailed-to-the-cross, speared-in-the-side, sealed-in-a-tomb Jesus – is going to meet them, and they're finally going to *get it*. They're finally going to see the whole picture; understand what he has been telling them for weeks. Jesus is alive and on the loose and he's going to meet them in the land of familiar homes, fishing-boat-jobs, and shattered dreams, and he's going to open their eyes to the meaning of the word "resurrection."

It used to be on Easter morning, almost every woman and girl wore a hat to church. A few of you may still, but most don't anymore. What we all should be wearing is crash helmets. We came to church this morning as the women went to the tomb on that first Easter morning: expecting one thing, and getting exactly what they didn't expect. We came to church thinking we'd know what to expect. Positive messages of hope and joy, uplifting prayers and bright, jubilant music – trumpets and trombones, handbells and tympani, organ and choir all making our hearts beat a little faster and our spirits rise a little higher. And there's nothing wrong with that, unless that's all you came to church expecting, because that's not what Easter is really about.

*Easter is really about the earthshaking, ground-quaking news that death has been rolled away and tombs have been made obsolete, that Jesus is on the loose and he is going to meet you and me in Galilee.*

He is going to meet us in that place that is so familiar we scarcely look around to see what's different. But, if you take the time to look around, you'll see the signs of his presence. You'll see the people in your life differently and your fishing boat job differently. You'll even see your sadnesses and struggles differently, because he'll meet you in those, too.

Maybe home is a hard place for you to be right now. Maybe there are people in your life who are hard to live with – maybe *you're* hard to live with sometimes. Maybe there is illness in your home; stagnation in your marriage; alienation in your family. Maybe your job is going nowhere, or your search for a job is going nowhere, or school seems to be taking you nowhere. When you leave this place and go back home to Galilee, you should know that Jesus is on the loose and he's going to meet you there, and he's going to teach you the meaning of resurrection: hope out of disappointment, joy out of sadness, life out of death. He's going to teach you how he can work all things

together for good, even the saddest and hardest things in your life.

When you start seeing what he's doing in your life and realizing how much love he has for you that he not only died on a cross for you, but has risen in order to give you life, and meet you in your Galilee, in your fishing boat office or classroom, in your comfortable, all-too-familiar home, you are going to feel some changes beginning to take place. Your job is not the same if Jesus is there with you. Your home is not the same if Jesus is a permanent resident. Your heart is not the same if he's living there, too. You're going to start treating your family and friends and neighbors and co-workers as though this is their Galilee, too, and Jesus is meeting them – maybe through you.

When Jesus meets you in your Galilee, your Galilee isn't the same place. It is holy ground; sacred space. Take off your sandals, but keep on your crash helmet because Jesus is on the loose. He's going to challenge you to take up your cross and follow him, with all the pain and suffering that entails. He's also going to promise you that he'll be with you even to the end of the age. There will be times when you'll shout, "My God, why have you forsaken me," and times when you will feel like the stone has been rolled away and a new life has begun.

So when you leave this place, don't go home thinking Easter is just about egg hunts and ham dinners. Go home looking for him, because he is going to meet you there in your Galilee. He's going to shove you out of your comfort zones, he's going to challenge you to trust him when that seems like the most insane thing you ever heard of, and then he's going to give you life – abundant and eternal, limitless and boundary-less life. Because Jesus Christ is risen! He is on the loose, and, when you get back to Galilee, he'll be there waiting.