

CHRIST MEMORIAL EPISCOPAL CHURCH, NORTH BROOKFIELD, MA

SERMON—Rev. Dr. Paula Winsor Sage

APRIL 16, 2017

EASTER

MATTHEW 28:1-10

PRAYER: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you Lord and help us to know you better. AMEN

CHRIST IS RISEN! (Please Ring the bells every time anyone says that) ALLELUIA!

WELCOME THIS WONDERFUL MORNING. OR AS THE HYMN SAYS, “WELCOME

HAPPY MORNING, AGE TO AGE SHALL SAY”.

I had a thought that I would start off the Easter Sermon this morning with a little

Easter Trivia quiz. If you know the answers, shout them out.

1. What does the word “Easter” mean? (Comes from old English “oestre”

Goddess of month of April. Most non-English speaking countries say

“Pascha” or something close.)

2. When was the first Easter celebrated? (Not sure, but well established by

150 a.d.)

3. How do we know the date for Easter? (1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after the full moon following the Spring Equinox [when the sun crosses the equator]. In the early church it was the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the month Nisan (April). Always between Mar 22 and April 25.)
4. Is the word Easter in the Bible ? ( No. It occurs only once, in the King James version, Acts 12:4, where it is an error. It is a mistranslation of the Greek “pascha”, which is the word for “Passover”.)
5. What do we celebrate on Easter? (Jesus’ Resurrection from the dead.)
6. Why do we celebrate it? (We thank God and rejoice because He brought Jesus back from the dead, not only for Jesus’ sake, but for us also; it marks for us the beginning of new life and forgiveness and living forever. It seems also that just as the 2 Mary’s were commanded to go and tell the disciples, we are also commanded to share the central message of our faith, the “good news.”: Christ died (in order to pay for our sins). Christ was buried. Christ was raised up on the third day (to ensure for us forgiveness and eternal life). This is why

we worship Him. This is why we celebrate Easter. You will notice that on Good Friday there was an earthquake when Jesus died. In today's Gospel there is an earthquake to mark his resurrection. The very world itself that God created is shaking to confirm the truth of these events! Paul says (I Corinthians 15), "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved". We are told to believe and to confess, which means that we are all evangelists. An evangelist is not some person with special training; it is anyone who tries to tell another person about this simple—literally earthshaking--good news.)

#### ONE LAST QUESTION

7. Who was the first Evangelist in scripture? The first to say "Christ is risen"?

(Although the angel said it first, the two Mary's [neither of them Jesus' mother, by the way] were the first people. They are certainly proof that you need not be important or trained to be God's messenger (which is what an evangelist is). We can see by clearly their behavior in this Gospel exactly

what one DOES have to be to qualify as an evangelist. First, these women followed Jesus when he was alive; they provided for him and the disciples; they watched him crucified and did not run away. Then they waited and they watched, and they wanted to go and see the tomb. Despite earthquake and warnings and fear so great it struck down and paralyzed the guards, they bravely went and they looked into the tomb. They heard Jesus' command delivered by the angel, and then they were able to see and recognize the risen Jesus. Then they obeyed without question. Finally, they went to the disciples and delivered the message. What was the message?: " He is risen from the dead." )

But that was not all of the Easter message. They are also told to say, "He has gone ahead of you to Galilee and he will meet you there. " This was the message to the disciples and this is the Easter message for us today. The geography may have changed, but the meaning has not! HE HAS GONE AHEAD, AND HE WILL MEET YOU THERE.

Christ is risen from the dead and he is here for us. And, he continues to go ahead of us to prepare the way for us—wherever we are. He goes ahead of us to forgive, to provide, to encourage, to reassure, to show us the way—and to raise the dead—to raise us, that is, when it is our time.

But, just as the two Mary's had to overcome their fear and go and peer into the tomb in order to find and recognize Jesus, we cannot see Jesus, nor can we follow him, until we too have overcome our fears and have dared to gaze into the tomb. In order to do that, we have to recognize how great God's power, and his love, really are—the power He showed when he rolled back the stone and sent the earthquake and raised Jesus from the dead, and the love that he showed when he sent his son to die to save us.

We have to recognize that power and surrender to it. We have to conquer our fear of giving up control in order to do that. In order to follow Jesus, we first have to see him as he is—and bow before him. We have to recognize the greatness of his love and the greatness of the Father who

raised him from the dead. The amazing thing is that, as we continue to delay and hold back, out of his boundless love, He waits for us, wherever our Galilee is, and He will never abandon us. He is waiting for us to go to the tomb and look for Him and then to go out and say to our brothers and sisters and family and friends, "I have seen the Lord. He is risen from the dead. In his great love, He has gone ahead of us and is waiting for us. If you go to meet him, he will never leave you."

This Easter message, this "Good News" does not end with Jesus' resurrection. And it is not a message for the Easter season only. It promises for us too that the end of our lives is not death, but resurrection with Jesus. We can and will rise with him, as he leads us forward into a renewed life of forgiveness and unending, transforming love.

**CHRIST IS RISEN!**

May you experience all the of His love this Easter season. AMEN

