

Bible Study Guide: Week of 4-6-2020

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Blessed Holy Week to you all. This week we will look at our Gospel reading for Easter Sunday. May you and your family be held firmly in God's love and care in and in spite of all that is going on in the world. I welcome any questions or discussion as always. Be in touch if you need me.

In Christ's love,

Pastor Andrew

Gospel: Matthew 28:1-10

¹After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ²And 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. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. ⁵But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷Then 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." ⁸So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

¹After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.

"The other Mary" is described in Matthew 27:56 as "the mother of James and Joseph." In Matthew 13:55 the people of Jesus' hometown synagogue mention that two of Jesus' brothers are named James and Joseph. It is likely, though not certain that "the other Mary" is Mary, the mother of Jesus. Matthew's decision to refer to her as "the other Mary" here highlights her role as a disciple of Jesus rather than her role as his biological mother. Here the Marys go "to see the tomb." They are expecting to visit a place of burial and death.

²And 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. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.

Just as the death of Jesus was marked by a great earthquake (Matthew 27:51), so the earth shakes at/after his resurrection. The appearance of the angel is somewhat reminiscent of Jesus' appearance during the Transfiguration. God's power and presence are clear to the reader and to Mary, Mary, and the soldiers present there.

⁴For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men.

According to Matthew 27:62-66, the Jewish leadership believed that Jesus' disciples would steal his body from the tomb and claim that he had been raised from the dead (due to Jesus' predictions throughout his ministry of being killed and raised). Therefore, they asked Pilate to have the tomb guarded by soldiers, which he granted. These guards ironically "became like dead men" at the tomb of Jesus. Jesus, meanwhile, we know, is very much alive again.

⁵But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.

The angels greet the women with the classic angelic greeting: “Do not be afraid.” The angel also proclaims the news of the resurrection to the women and invites them to see where Jesus’ body had been. The presence of the angel, along with the presence of military and political might echoes the birth of Jesus as Matthew told it—the angel’s visit to Joseph, the story of Herod’s slaughter of the innocents, etc. God’s life and salvation cannot be held at bay by enemies, even powerful ones such as Herod or Rome. God’s will is done despite the powers stacked against it.

⁷Then 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.”

The women are made the first witnesses and heralds of the resurrection. This would have flown in the face of contemporary notions about the role of women in society in that day.

⁸So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

The women came to the tomb with sorrow—expecting to see the place where Jesus was buried. Instead, their sorrow now gives way to “fear and great joy.” How interesting that they have room in their hearts for both fear and great joy.

⁹Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him.

This is the first of Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances according to Matthew. While the women are on the way, they see the resurrected Jesus. His greeting to them is curiously short. The women “take hold of Jesus’ feet.” What do we make of this? Perhaps that is simply a description of the traditional posture of worship—prostrating oneself at the feet of another. It is possibly a parallel to Thomas’ insistence on seeing Jesus’ hands and the nail marks. Traditionally, at least, Jesus’ wounds are depicted as having been in his hands, feet, and side. More likely, it is a veiled reference to Isaiah 52:7—

How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,
who brings good news,
who announces salvation,
who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’

¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

Again, the women are given the encouragement “do not be afraid,” this time from Jesus directly. The church’s mission always takes place with fear and great joy; Christ comes among us and bids our fears to cease for the sake of his mission among us.

Reflection/Discussion Questions:

1. The women came to hold vigil—“to see the tomb,” but were surprised by the astounding news of the resurrection. Can you think of a time when you expected one thing, but God surprised you with something else?
2. The women had “fear and great joy.” What do you think they were afraid of? Was this merely “awe?” Were they afraid of sharing the news that Jesus was raised? Were they afraid of the guards? Were they afraid of the angel?
3. What are our fears as God’s people? What is our “great joy?”