

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

2 There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow.4 The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

5 The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. 6 He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

8 So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

A Shaking Experience

When we arrived in California I joked with the children that earthquakes are a regular occurrence here and we should get used to the ground moving beneath our feet. After all we live next to the San Andreas fault but to be honest I'm a little disappointed because it feels like I've lied to my kids. We haven't had any earthquakes and maybe that's a good thing.

I'm not hoping for an earthquake because after our readings this past week it feels like I've had my fill of the ground shaking. On Palm Sunday Matthew records that the whole city was stirred (Ἐσείσθη). On Good Friday there was another earthquake that shook the temple and split the curtain from top to bottom. Then again another earthquake announce Jesus' resurrection which leads to people shaking, trembling in fear and wondering what all of this could mean. If earthquakes aren't a regular occurrence in California then they sure seem that way in Matthew's gospel.

It's not because Matthew understood how earthquakes worked but in the Old Testament earthquakes often announced that God was saying something. It's not the first time that God spoke to his people and the earth shook but this is the first time after the resurrection that a message from a messenger had the same results. The resurrection which happened just as he said - shook the world.

Normally a death wouldn't make much news. After a while life would return to normal. But what happened on Friday shook up the disciples. They wouldn't even go to the tomb. They deserted him. They doubted and were stuck in disbelief of what had happened. Their world was ruined. Their hopes shattered. It was like a massive earthquake had just overturned all their expectations.

They did not expect the world to be any different than the one they left behind on Friday. Even Mary and Martha expected to find a body. They did not set out that day with happy and hopeful hearts. They went to continue the burial process. Jesus was dead. When the body was not there the natural response was doubt. Where is the body? Who took it?

That's why I love the Resurrection history. Matthew portrays God's people as ordinary individuals who are full of doubt, disbelief, and fear. People just like you and me are found on the pages of scripture. We too are just like the disciples and if not like them then Mary and Martha. Because people just don't come back from the dead.

We too have moments when death turns our life shakes us. As we grow older more friends and family die around us - shakes us because death hits closer to home, closer to home every day. That's the reality we have to deal with. Moments like earthquakes remind us just how fragile we are. Then there are the doubts that surround us. We have not lived as we should. We have not been without doubt. Maybe like the disciples have no reason to return to the tomb because that wouldn't demonstrate how unfaithful we've been.

But what shook up Mary, Martha, and even the disciples wasn't that Jesus was dead but the news that he was alive. When the angel arrived the Roman soldier who is so used to staring down death is so shaken they can't move. Mary and Martha are so shaken the angel has to calm them down, "Don't be afraid. He is risen just as he said." And even after they've seen Jesus, hear his voice, touch his body, they still need to hear the same message from him, "*Don't be afraid.*" You can imagine how the disciples must feel having abandoned, walked away, denied one who has come back from the dead. That's like making enemies with one who has power over life and death.

But that's where the good news begins because Jesus doesn't condemn the disciples and their disbelief. He doesn't hide in the tomb jump out and say, "Boo." He comforts them with his word. He stills their trembling hearts. He holds on to them and even gives the women a message, "Go tell my brothers." This is how God deal with his people who have failed to listen to him, who have worried it all depends on them, who have promised their faithfulness to follow him to death and have failed. He says to them, "Go and tell my

brothers.” The last time Jesus saw Peter he was calling down curses that he didn’t know Jesus and running away from him and yet Jesus calls him his brother.

Though difficult to believe: Jesus was alive and life was changed. That message shook the world.

As Americans we live a fairly fluid society in which traditions are dropped as fast as new ones are formed. We change but not the Jews. They were able to survive exile. God had given them a strict set of rules to keep them separate from the surrounding world. The purpose behind all of these odd regulations concerning food and what is clean and unclean was to preserve his word. But an earthquake caused by an empty tomb changed all of that.

It wasn’t just an empty tomb but it was that Jesus stood before them. This turned a culture upside down. It upset 1500 years of tradition that didn’t change. These aren’t minor shifts that happened over hundreds of years this is an immediate shift among the first generation that took place when Jewish Christians quit worshipping on the Sabbath and offering sacrifices at the temple. In such a short time - not just one Jew but an entire community of at least 10,000 Jews change. It started with an earthquake, an angel, a few women, the disciples, and that went throughout Jerusalem, Samaria, to the ends of the earth.

Not just minor adjustment of thought - this is a social upheaval because dead people don’t just rise from the dead but this one did. It’s not just a claim that the dead come back to life but that God entered human history and created a new reality which does not end at death.

And really that is the reason we are here today because the Son of God died on a cross, was buried, and three days later, on a Sunday morning two thousand years ago, he came back to life. He walked out of his grave with the good news that we no longer have to fear death. That message reverberates through time and eternity. It’s a message for us doubters who are afraid because our faith is flawed and are fearful because of our doubts.

This is how God deals with those who have let him down. Don’t be afraid. I died to forgive you. I’m alive. I’m on your side. I’m your brother. You are family. Though you may have wandered from the church and stayed away for some time though you may be a chester - one who comes only on Christmas and Easter - God won’t hold that against you and neither will we. You may still be afraid. Afraid of the future, worrying about work, and your health may be failing. There is fear even with faith - Look at Mary and Martha and how they fled from the tomb, “*afraid yet filled with joy,*” .

You may be afraid. You may doubt the truth but doubt can't put Jesus back into the tomb. Fear and doubt are forgivable. It can't take away the fact that Jesus calls you family. Sometimes he even grabs hold of your shoulders and shakes you trying to get it through to you - you're forgiven. So go tell your brothers and sisters. Jesus is risen just as he said.

Earthquakes still happen but not as frequently as I've been led to believe outside of California. Evil is all around us. The disciple knew that but that didn't stop them either. Though they had nothing to gain and everything to lose they were so shaken and changed by the resurrection that they died for their beliefs and passed on to us what we know. I don't know of a single person who would die for a lie but it wasn't just one of them all 11 apostles died confessing their hope in the resurrection. And God willing I will too because Jesus has been raised from the dead. Jesus lives and that is the beating heart of the hope we have that because he lives you and I will live forever body and soul.

So even if I haven't experienced a California earthquake - I think I'll be fine. The resurrection of Jesus has shaken the world for centuries, changing lives, destroying death, and changing the course of human history and eternity. This earthquake will continue until God shakes the world once again with that final trumpet call when death is overcome forever.