

April 4, 2021

## Matthew 28:1-10

### Something Better

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Do you ever go to the store to buy one thing, but come home with something else? Back during the start of Covid my wife Monica was seven months pregnant and I went grocery shopping. This was new for me. I'm not usually the one to go to Market Basket. It was kinda fun. You learn where things are, the dairy section, the cereals, the meats, the frozen vegetables. I got the hang of it, but as I was walking around the store, I would see all these foods we had never tried.

So I started buying new things to surprise my wife Monica. It started with this green looking bulbous plant that looked like the child of an onion and cabbage with some parsley mixed in. They call it fennel. Have any of you ever had fennel? I don't like it.

But when I brought home the fennel, Monica got pretty excited. She'd thought of buying it but never had. We ate it. It was okay. It tastes like cooked licorice to me, so if you put it in chicken, it makes your chicken taste like licorice. You're probably wondering what this has to do with Easter. I'm getting there. The next time I went to the store I bought one of those packaged sausages that looks like it should be hanging in a butcher shop window. Turns out we'd had that before.

The next time I bought an octopus. What I didn't remember when I bought it was the last time we'd had octopus was actually on our honeymoon. So when I brought it home, it was actually kinda romantic. That's how we keep the romance alive in our house, octopus.

You ever have that experience, where you go somewhere expecting one thing, and you come away with something entirely different, even better? Maybe it was going to the store, or going to a movie, or reading a book, or going on a date. You thought you were just going out for dinner, and you met your husband or wife. You go for one thing, but you return with something much better.

What have you come here for today? A chance to get outside and life to feel a little normal? Maybe you've come to celebrate Easter with your family. I'm so glad you're here. What if you came here expecting one thing but went home with something even better? That's what the resurrection of Jesus offers each of us.

Two days after Jesus' death, two women went to the tomb for one thing, to grieve and mourn, but they come back with something much better. Just two days before on the day we call "Good Friday," Mary Magdalene and a group of women saw Jesus cry out with a loud voice on the cross and give up his spirit (Matthew 27:50). They saw Jesus die. Then Mary Magdalene and another woman named Mary followed Joseph of Arimathea as he took the body of Jesus and dressed it for burial. They sat there and watched and mourned.

And that's how the story goes when we encounter death, right? When someone dies, you buy them a coffin, you hold a viewing, then a funeral, and then you visit their gravestone to remember them. That's what's normal, right? Death is the end, and then you figure out how to try and move on with your life.

You don't go to the funeral to see if the person will come back to life. You ever see those mobster movies where the mobsters always have needles, and stab the dead person in the hand to see if they really are dead? That's not what the two Marys are doing. They saw Jesus die. They're going to say goodbye. They brought spices with them to anoint Jesus' body (Mark 16:1). They want to say goodbye. But God has other plans. They were going to the tomb for one reason, but they were going to leave with something better.

The two Marys walk to the tomb, sad, carrying their burdens. Pilate sealed the tomb and stationed guards outside so no one could steal the body. But that morning the ground begins to shake and an angel descends from heaven. The angel goes to the stone and rolls it away and sits on it. He sits on it. I love that!

Do you ever watch WWF wrestling? Did you know there was a sumo-wrestler who joined the WWF called Akebono? He was a really big guy. He [weighed over 500 pounds](#). In one match he knocks his opponent down onto the mat, and the finish him off, Akebono climbs up on the side of the ring, jumps through the air, and [slams his opponent with his bum!](#) 500-pound bum slam! The ref slaps the three-count and Akebono wins! But then he just kinda sits there, on his opponent, for another 30 seconds. He shows him and every WWF fan who is boss. Akebono!

That's what the angel does. He rolls back the tomb stone, and he sits on it, 500-pound bum slam! The angel disrespects death itself. God has crushed death through the resurrection of Jesus. Death has lost. Death will not have the final word. Did you know the final book of the Bible, Revelation, tells us one day God is going through throw death itself into hell. To hell with death! And that any who trust Jesus will receive eternal life.

In the U.S., a lot of people have died from Covid, 550,000. I've heard that other deaths have also increased due to the strain on our healthcare system. Maybe you know someone who died this year. I'm sorry. That's the sting of death. But do you know that one day God will throw covid and all the harm and death it has caused into the lake of fire. One day there will be no more pandemics, no more death, no more sorrow. And it's all because of Jesus' death and resurrection from the tomb.

**Romans 4:25** says, "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification." (NIV) Jesus had to die to take the penalty for our sins. That means he had to die to put to death, death. Somehow, the power of death died with him. But "[Jesus] was raised to life for our justification." To be justified before God means to be right with him.

In the resurrection, God is beginning to set the whole world right again. God is restoring the natural order we lost at Eden.<sup>1</sup> The resurrection is like that first bite of strawberry ice-cream cone, the first taste. The whole thing is coming. The resurrection is the promise that one day people aren't going to be controlled by sin and death but eternal life and human flourishing and that King Jesus will do it all.

In fact, we actually see an example of what that eternal flourishing will look like, right here in the text. In the ancient culture of Jesus' day women weren't considered equals with men. They couldn't testify in a court of law. But what does Jesus do, he first appears to women, and then tells the women to go and preach the gospel to the men. Jesus is showing the nature of his newly created order, where death is conquered and people are valued and esteemed as equals in God's sight. A woman carried a sign at a rally that read:

"The Risen Jesus extended grace and hope to women first because he respected and valued their testimonies." - All Four Gospels

We as a nation just suffered a horrible tragedy in Atlanta. 8 people killed, seven of whom were women, six of whom were Asian. Jesus declares, "That's not okay! That's evil!" Jesus loves and values and respects women of every nationality and we as Christians and the church do too. When the angel appeared to the women, he said, "Do not be afraid!" The women didn't need to be afraid when they encountered the angel and Jesus is restoring a world where women don't need to fear because Jesus is making all things new.

So how do you get it? Is it like getting the vaccine? You just make an appointment, you go, and then you're worry free. No, you go to one website, where you get in line, then you go to another website. Oh, and you

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<sup>1</sup> Keller, Timothy. Hope in Times of Fear (p. 24). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

also sign a form saying you're qualified to get the shot in the first place. Don't want to purger yourself here! And then if you need to change your appointment, that's a whole thing too

That's how a lot of us think about God. You have to live this life exactly right, or you won't get the vaccine. You have to live a good life, volunteer at a charity, give on Giving Tuesday, be a good person. But how much good stuff am I supposed to do? And what kinda good stuff am I supposed to do? If God doesn't tell us what he expects, it's like going to class for the first day. The teacher says you will be tested at the end of the semester. Your entire grade rests on that test, but she doesn't tell you the topic, give you a reading list, or help you learn anything. She just walks out of the room!<sup>2</sup> What type of God would do that? Instead, Jesus came to tell us what God expects, and the standards are unbearably high.

God expects absolute perfection from each of us. You always have to be good all the time. That's how you pass his test. But none of us can do that. We're all sinful and broken people. But then he sends his Son Jesus to take the test for us. He passes it perfectly. He lived a perfect life and died to give us the grade he deserves. "[Jesus] was raised to life for our justification."

The angel says, "Jesus isn't here. Jesus is alive!" The two Marys went to the tomb expecting one thing, death, but they're going home with something much better, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. You could go home with that today as well. You came here expecting an Easter service, but you could go home with eternal life. The pathway to knowing God is not through doing good deeds. It's through Jesus. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.

The two Marys, when they heard the news, it says they were "afraid yet filled with joy." They were happy, but freaked out! You ever go to an amusement park and listen to the people screaming on the coasters? Generally, it's like a joyful scream, right? "Ahhh!" It's scary to hear Jesus is really alive. But Jesus will meet you in that place.

Jesus meets the women. He says, "Good morning!" You know what they do when Jesus greets them? They fall down on their hands and knees, clasp his feet, and worship him. That's what we do when we realize who Jesus is, he is God, come in the flesh, to set the whole world right again and to rescue you and me.

What did you come here for today? Bunnies and Easter eggs? You can go home knowing death is not the end because Jesus defeated the grave and offers eternal life to any who will repent of their sins and believe in him. I went to the store to buy eggs and bacon but I came home with fennel and octopus. You can go home with fennel and octopus too! Jesus is alive. Let's pray.

*Pastor [Jonathan Romig](#) preached this message on the Westford Common for Easter, on April 4th 2021. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above. You can also listen on [Apple Podcasts](#). Read the [story of our church here](#).*

## Discussion Questions

1. What do you like about Easter? What are some favorite memories?
2. What do you think it would have been like to watch Jesus die on the cross?
3. How would Jesus' death shape your expectations going to the tomb Sunday morning?
4. Why do you think the angel comes so dramatically?

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<sup>2</sup> Illustration adapted from *How Good is Good Enough?*

5. Why does the resurrection matter?
6. Why do you think Jesus appears to the women?
7. What might Jesus be saying to you?

## **Sources**

Keller, Timothy. [Hope in Times of Fear](#) (p. 24). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Stanley, Andy. [Since Nobody's Perfect... How Good is Good Enough?](#) Multnomah, 2003.