4-15/16-17 Easter Rev. Amy Haines

Matthew 28:1-10 Love Rises Dare You to Love Series

Throughout his earthly ministry, turmoil surrounded Jesus. When he began to teach with authority, those who heard him were amazed and confused. When he began to heal the rejected and welcome the outcast, he upset the status quo. When he entered the city of Jerusalem for his final Passover festival, the whole city was in turmoil, asking once again, “Who is this?”

On Palm Sunday, the crowd replied, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Yet on Easter morning God replies, “This is my Son, your Savior, risen from the dead!”

The Greek word translated as turmoil is less about confusion and uncertainty and more about a quaking, a shaking, an earth-shattering, life changing moment.

Have you ever experienced one of those moments that quakes the ground under your feet, that shakes the core of who you are, that changes your life forever?

Sometimes, those earth-shattering moments are literal moments when the earth heaves, when floodwaters rise or when tornadoes turn our homes and towns into rubble and mud.

Sometimes, those earth-shattering moments are when we receive the unexpected news of job loss or a cancer diagnosis or the end of a marriage or the sudden death of a loved one.

Sometimes, those earth-shattering moments are positive life-changing events such as a marriage proposal or the birth of a child or first hearing the words I love you or the unconditional support of a close friend.

Sometimes, those earth-shattering moments are when God breaks into our lives with forgiving grace, with unbounded love, with peace in the midst of chaos, or with a call to serve and follow him. Think of when Joseph had an encounter with an angel telling him Mary was pregnant with the son of God. Think of when Saul was blinded on the road to Damascus and chosen as an apostle of Jesus. Think of when the Holy Spirit came upon the Gentiles to spread Jesus’ good news to all humankind. When has God broken through and shaken up your life with his call, his grace, his love, his word?

When the followers of Jesus entered Jerusalem for the Passover festival they never imagined the turmoil of that week. That final week was filled with life-changing moments--Watching the crowds shout hosanna as Jesus rode into town on a donkey. Listening to strange words spoken by Jesus at the Passover feast, as he suddenly declared one of his own would betray him and then to remember him in the bread and the cup. Struggling to comprehend Jesus’ intense plea to stay awake with him as he prayed in the Garden. Running away when Jesus was suddenly arrested. Returning to observe the agony of Jesus’ crucifixion and death.

At the end of the week, the followers of Jesus believed that death had defeated life, that hate had defeated love. They hid together in fear, in grief, in sorrow, disciples and women alike.

Then came Sunday morning.

Mary Magdalene could wait no longer to return to the tomb, needing one more time to be close to Jesus, dead or alive. In her own life, Mary had already experienced God’s resurrection power, although I am sure that was not what she was waiting for on that Easter morn.

She just needed to be close to Jesus one more time, as she owed him her life. Being a woman, from Magdala, possessed by seven demons, Mary had been an outcast among outcasts. Yet rather than shun her, Jesus had healed her, treated her as a beloved child of God, then invited her to come and follow him. Jesus restored her to new life, and as a follower of Jesus her life suddenly had meaning and purpose—until the moment Jesus died on the cross.

In grief, in shock, in confusion, Mary Magdalene and some of the other women went to the tomb as the day was dawning early on Sunday morning.

And there they experienced the greatest earth-shattering moment ever.

In the dawn of that first Easter morning, God broke through their grief with a mighty rumble,

a dazzling angel, and the incredible good news that Jesus has risen from the dead!

John Purdy captures the scene in his book, *God With a Human Face*.

“Cecil B. DeMille couldn’t have dreamed up anything more stunning. …There was an earthquake, caused by something like a sonic boom. An angel in shining raiment came plunging down out of the sky like a stealth fighter; he rolled back the tombstone and sat on it. The men who were guarding the tomb were scared to death – or at least so frightened that they passed out and lay like dead men. So dazzling was the heavenly messenger that it was reported –

presumably by the women - that he flashed like lightning. One can only guess at the timbre and resonance of his voice. Charlton Heston and James Earl Jones, eat your hearts out!”

--John Jewell 3-31-02 lectionarysermons.com

The women did not fully understand what was happening in front of them on that first Easter morning. An earthquake. An empty tomb. And an angel messenger proclaiming, “Do not be afraid. He is not here; he has been raised. Come and see, then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has been raised from the dead and will meet you in Galilee.” Hurriedly they left the tomb “with fear and great joy.”

Suddenly, on their way, Jesus appeared—and the women’s natural response was one of worship. Then Jesus reiterated the message of the angel: “Do not be afraid. See I am alive!

Go and tell my disciples that I will meet them in Galilee.”

The women were given good news to proclaim—Jesus is alive! Death was now defeated.

God’s love was now the final word.

This is earth-shattering good news which we hear and proclaim this morning!

In his life, Jesus taught and modeled God’s unconditional love for God’s beloved children.

In his death, Jesus showed the depth of God’s love that reached out in forgiveness and mercy.

And in his resurrection, Jesus showed the hope of God’s love that lasts for all eternity.

The women were given good news to proclaim—Jesus is alive!

And here today I proclaim to you—Jesus’ resurrection changes everything!

What is impossible with man is possible with God:

• Lost sons really can come running home to the arms of a loving father

• God really does go looking for the one lost sheep

• God really will provide for our needs even more than the birds and the flowers

• God really is powerful enough to heal, and to forgive sins

• God really did love the world enough to send his only son so that

everyone who believes in him may not perish but have everlasting life

• God really has gone to prepare a place for us so that where he is we may be also

--Dan Metzger orvseries.org/dareyou

Jesus risen from the dead shows that the power of God is stronger than death. Death no longer is a final reality, an end to be feared. An empty tomb declares there is life after death, eternal life for all who believe. An empty tomb also declares there is new life in this world, as God will be with us no matter what we face in this life. Jesus’ resurrection offers us hope for tomorrow,

whatever tomorrow may bring.

Rev. David Lose reminds us:

..In the resurrection, we have God’s promise that life is stronger than death, that love is greater than hate, that mercy overcomes judgment, and that all the sufferings and difficulties of this life are transient—real and palpable and sometimes painful, for sure, but they do not have the last word and do not represent the final reality.

-- David Lose “Dear Working Preacher: Easter Courage” 4-16-14 workingpreacher.org

Jesus risen from the dead also shows that the power of God is greater than sin.

I said it last week and I will say it again today: In the words of Rev. Adam Hamilton,

“Jesus paid a price he did not owe, giving us a gift of grace we did not deserve.”

--24 Hours Book p. 67

Sin and brokenness is what nailed Jesus to the cross. Yet through his death Jesus shattered the bonds of sin. And through his resurrection God shattered the bonds of death.

Jesus risen from the dead also shows that the love of God casts out fear. If you watch the news,

constantly listen to the sound bites, or view the world even in a five-mile radius around you,

there is much to make us fearful. Rumors of war, broken relationships, distrust of leadership,

the heroin epidemic, the pressure to succeed, economic concerns, pessimism for the future—all can make us fearful.

Yet God loves us so much as to send his Son Jesus to die for our sins. God loves us so much as to defeat death and raise Jesus from the dead and offer us new life in this world and the next.

God’s love casts out fear—or at least calls us forward in faith amid our fears. What we fear will not suddenly disappear when we trust in Jesus. Yet how we approach the world around us will change, which will calm our fears. When we trust in God’s presence and God’s promises we can follow the women forward in fear and great joy rather than be paralyzed like the guards at the empty tomb.

Finally, Jesus risen from the dead shows that God seeks to give our lives meaning and purpose.

The women—women whose testimony would never be accepted in a Jewish court of law— the women were the first to proclaim the good news of the resurrection. Jesus gave their life meaning and purpose. And the command given to them that first morning is a command given to us today—Come and see that Jesus is risen from the dead. Then go and tell what you have seen and heard of a crucified and risen Savior and Lord!

The earth-shattering message of the angel to the women is also a message of hope and joy for all of us here today. Christ is risen! Death has been defeated! Love has won!

Do you believe it? Do you want to believe it? How is the earth-shattering news of the resurrection life-changing news for you today?

..Father Basil Pennington, a Roman Catholic monk, once met with a teacher of Zen while on a retreat. He says that at his meeting the Zen teacher sat there before him smiling from ear to ear and rocking gleefully back and forth. Finally, the teacher said: “I like Christianity. But I would not like Christianity without the resurrection. I want to see your resurrection!”

Pennington notes that, “With his directness, the teacher was saying what everyone else implicitly says to Christians: You are a Christian. You are risen with Christ. Show me (what this means for you in your life) and I will believe.”

That is how people know if the resurrection is true or not. Does it affect how we live? The amazing thing is that every one of Jesus’ disciples passed this test. Their lives were dramatically turned upside down by their encounter with Christ. How would you ever make something like this up and stick to it when stones were piercing your flesh as did Stephen, the first Christian martyr? Or as you were being crucified upside down like Simon Peter? It is hard to dispute the testimony of someone who is so convinced of what they have experienced that they are willing to suffer and die to tell the story.

--Adapted by Marilyn Omernick, esermons.com

Easter was a morning of earth-shattering consequence, when a tomb was found empty and death defeated. Easter is also an experience of earth-shattering power that can occur daily in the mini-Easters of our lives. How have you experienced Easter’s resurrection power in your life and faith?

When the hungry are fed, when a child is loved, when praise to God is lifted high, Easter occurs all over again. When in spite of turmoil, when in spite of struggle, God’s love is trusted, and God’s grace is received, there is Easter joy. Every time a lost soul finds a home in Jesus, that is resurrection. Every relationship that reconciles, every sin that is forgiven, every act of unselfish love for another person is a place where resurrection is found.

Johnny Ray Youngblood, pastor of Saint Paul's Community Baptist Church in Brooklyn, says:

"Every time I see a man put down his bottle, there's a resurrection goin' on.

Every time I see a man go back to school, there's a resurrection goin' on.

Every time I see a man hug his son, there's a resurrection goin' on."

..Years ago, Lee Strobel, a journalist with the Chicago Tribune, became a Christian and began to open himself to Christ's transforming power. His story is now in theaters in the movie “The Case for Christ.” Increasingly, Strobel found that he wanted the motives and perspective of Jesus to be his own. Does that sound "mystical," he asks? Maybe it does. But it's very real to him now, and to those around him.

In fact, he reports that just a few months after he became a Christian, his 5-year-old daughter went up to his wife and said, "Mommy, I want God to do for me what he's done for Daddy."  
Here was a little girl who had only known a father who was profane, angry, verbally harsh and all-too-often absent. But when she had seen up close the influence that Jesus can have on one person's life, she in effect, said what we all seek to say, "If this is what God’s resurrection power does to a human being, that's what I want for me."

--adapted Homileticsonline.com 3-31-02

May the earth-shattering news of an empty tomb long ago still be life-changing news for you today.

Do not be afraid.

Trust that you are loved.

Trust that you are forgiven.

Believe in the power of God.

Believe in the promises of God.

Go forth to share the good news of Easter with others.

Go forth to live open to God’s resurrection power in your life.

Christ is alive. Death has been defeated.

Come and see, then go and tell the glory of Christ’s resurrection, love offered to you and love offered to me.

May it be so.