

## **April 12, 2020 (Resurrection Sunday) | Journey Worship**

**TEXT:** [Matthew 28:1–10](#)

**TITLE:** Anticipation

*By the Rev. Patrice Fowler-Searcy*

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

I find myself waking up every morning around 5:00. And as I lay in the bed, I typically think about the things I want or need to accomplish that day, and then I pray. I thank God for last night's rest and for protecting me through the night. I pray for my family, friends, and colleagues; and I ask God to guide my thoughts and my actions, and to help me to treat everyone I encounter with care and compassion. Then I ask God to help me to accomplish everything set before me to do that day. It's quiet at 5:00 in the morning. If my window is slightly ajar, some days I can hear the birds chirping outside. And if I get up at just the right time, as I did today, I catch the beauty and majesty of the sun rising in the east. It is in the quiet, calm, and tranquility of the morning that I most profoundly experience God's presence.

I imagine that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary experienced the quiet and calm of the early morning and that the sun was just beginning to rise in the east as they made their way to the place where Jesus was buried. I imagine they anticipated that the tomb where Jesus lay was still sealed with the heavy stone and they would not be able to enter in.

According to the writer of the Gospel of Matthew, the women went to see the tomb that early Sunday morning. As followers of Jesus, these women had seen and experienced a lot. They saw Jesus healing the sick and raising the dead. They witnessed Jesus reaching out to and embracing people who were deemed untouchable – lepers, a woman with an issue of blood, tax collectors, Samaritans, demoniacs, the poor. They witnessed Jesus welcoming Gentiles, the least of these, and yes even women into his inner circle. They witnessed Jesus speak truth to political and religious leaders alike.

These women witnessed the injustice of Jesus' trial, and him being turned over to the ravenous crowd to be whipped and degraded. They witnessed Jesus carrying his cross

to Golgotha and the horror of his crucifixion, and they heard Jesus cry out to God in agony and pain. These women saw the day turn dark as the night, the earth shake, and rocks split as Jesus breathed his last breath and died. These women witnessed the opening of the tombs of people who died in the faith, and the centurion's conversion at Calvary.

When the other disciples scattered fearful for their own lives and well-being, the women remained. They were more than followers of Jesus. They had traveled with and provided financially for Jesus and his disciples, and they stayed by Jesus' side even in death, until they were required to retreat to their homes in recognition of the Sabbath.

Yet, after witnessing and experiencing the chaos and turmoil of Jesus' crucifixion and burial, early in the morning on the third day, the women made their way to see the tomb. The other gospels indicate that the women made their way that early morning to anoint Jesus' body. But, according to Matthew, days before, Jesus was anointed by the woman with expensive oil in an alabaster box and after his death Joseph of Arimathea was granted permission to take Jesus' body and give it a proper burial. So, what did the two Mary's plan to do when they got to the tomb and what did they anticipate finding there?

Almost a month ago today, we weren't anticipating that our lives and the world would be disrupted and turned upside down by a pandemic. Although the last time we worshipped together in the church building we had to socially distance, could not shake hands or greet one another with a hug. We certainly could not have anticipated that we would be under a stay at home order to keep others and ourselves from contracting COVID-19. There was no way to anticipate that within in the space of a month, the number of people with the virus would grow from under 50 to over 16,000 confirmed cases in Pennsylvania. We could not have anticipated that during one of the most sacred weeks and Sundays in the life of Christians we would be worshipping virtually. Nothing could have prepared us for the state in which we find ourselves, and yet here we are, seeking understanding.

Just as we seek understanding about the pandemic ravishing the world, the women arrived at the tomb that early morning to see, seeking understanding and insight. Surely, as they followed Jesus, they had heard him say that he would die and that on the third day he would be raised from the dead. Perhaps they came anticipating they would witness something so mysterious and miraculous that only God could do. As they approached the tomb, once again the earth shook, and an angel with an appearance like lightening, dressed in clothing white as snow, descended from heaven and rolled back the stone that covered the tomb where Jesus had been buried.

The men guarding the tomb were frightened by heavenly visitation, the earth shaking, the stone being rolled away, and they became as dead men. The angel told the women, do not be afraid. I know you're anticipating seeing the crucified Jesus laying in the tomb, but he is not here. He has been raised from the dead, just as he said. The quiet calm of the morning was disrupted, disturbed and turned upside down. Those who were living

appeared to be dead, and he who was dead is back among the living. The angel's proclamation was more than informational. It was confirmation and a challenge to the women to have faith in the resurrection and in the evidence of God's faithfulness to fulfill the promise to send a messiah who would be raised from the dead and save the world.

The angel's words inform, confirm and challenge us today, to believe that Jesus has been risen from the dead, and to have faith that God is going to do just as God has promised. God never promised that we would not suffer sickness, disease or death. God never promised that we wouldn't experience financial and economic distress, homelessness or hunger. God never promised that we would not experience injustice, inequality or inequity. God never promised that pandemics wouldn't ravage the world. God promised to send a savior who would be both human in order to understand our condition and divine in order to save us from our condition. God promised to be with us during sickness, disease and even death. God promised that his justice would supersede the world's injustices.

As Paul wrote to the church in Rome, "What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? God who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will God not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:31-39).

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the tomb in the quiet, tranquil, calm of the morning because they wouldn't allow death to separate them from their Messiah and Savior. Their faith in God compelled them to go to the tomb and anticipate seeing Jesus. And as they ran away in fear and great joy to share the good news of Jesus' resurrection with the other disciples, suddenly Jesus met them and said, 'Behold!' The women came to Jesus, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.'

Beloved, on this Resurrection Sunday, we are all facing uncertainties, we are surrounded and overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of sick and dying people, fear may have overtaken people who don't have the resources they need to pay their bills, buy food, or access medical care; and we all expect that life as we know it will never be the same. But be assured and anticipate that our gracious, merciful, and loving God is with us, Holy Spirit is within us confirming, comforting, and keeping, so we can endure and face with fear and great joy everything that concerns, discourages, and disheartens,

and be assured and anticipate that Christ will meet us as he has risen from the dead.  
He has risen indeed.

Alleluia! And Amen.