

Guilford Park Presbyterian Church, Greensboro, NC

April 12, 2020 .

Easter Sunday Worship

Preached by Dr. Christopher Schooley

Matthew 28: 1-10

Easter for Gospel-writer Matthew, begins with two women, hunting for a tomb for which they had rough directions. They didn't have high confidence for locating it. Matthew describes their mood with a greek word meaning either "wait" or "hope." Most of us, this Easter, find it difficult to imagine we could make a single English word to mean both "wait" AND "hope."

"Wait" that's certainly a word for this day. What *are we* waiting for? For the sick to recover, for coronavirus to be subdued, for the isolation to end; for the hopelessness to be relieved?

Then, the women, are startled. It's another earthquake, like the one Friday that tore the curtain in the Temple. Now again. Then, out of somewhere an angel appears above them. The women have been through a frightening week. And now an angel!

The week began with children **waving palms** alongside a little caravan, and in its midst, a fellow is riding a donkey, followed by an enthusiastic group, forming up a parade; while other groups were simultaneously parading into Jerusalem, come to celebrate passover.

Then, four days later, Jesus' and his most intimate followers, the 12, ate dinner together, and one account of that meal describes a **bowl and a towel**, with Jesus on his knees, washing the feet of his fellows. An everyday occurrence for those intimates, an uncommon image for us who bathe or shower our feet almost daily, without much thought.

THEN time seems to rush, Jesus and his followers including these two Marys, worry through many hours—with rumors of arrests; then hearings and harangues from Jewish and Roman officials; then an impromptu trial, then a swift ending. It comes Friday noon, with these, **these nails** driven through his hands, his feet, they were the instruments of death. Public death, in its horror, its pain, its anguish. We have scant acquaintance with crucifixion death, just as we have scant acquaintance with coronavirus death.

This Easter morning for us too, presents a world abuzz with disease and death, as it was when the two Marys made their way only to be startled by an angel. The Bible teaches angels can bring mercy or bring death. That day, the angel brought mercy. "He's not here, he's gone, outside of town, tell the rest."

That was the Mary's week. Unimaginable. Then later that same resurrection day, a couple of the women's friends are walking to Emmaus and bump into, a stranger, outside of town, he walked alongside, later they realized, "it's the risen Jesus." Unimaginable!

We too, have had an unimaginable week. What's on our mind this week, is how *fragile, vulnerable* we all are. This was not a Holy week; not a week for bold predictions such as resurrection was immanent. Rather this week announced our human folly, the hubris of mortals. In the middle of the week,

there was, nestled in my human heart, an ardent longing that we not only be rescued from this, but that justice might prevail over the *capriciousness, the foolishness* that seems to abound when our world is turned on its head.

What we come to realize, if we have times of realization these days, is that all of us thrive—no, depend—on the world *being meaningful*. Even though we are offered statistics, graphs, head counts, ventilator shortage numbers, flattening-the-curve pictures, all of that meant to give meaning by doing math. Doing the math, doesn't give meaning.

It is in the destruction, in seeing evil with all its fury, that meaning comes, as we become desperate for a detour, a way out, a road away from the wilderness. I don't yet see any roads, do you?

But I do have a story, about another pandemic,..it might be of help. Christians are familiar with pandemics, leprosy, the epidemic in Jesus' day; memories of the Bubonic plague in Luther and Calvin's day, and then another, a 100 years after the Reformers, in Ellenberg in Saxony,, there the Sweedish army was besieging the city, already covered with plague. Starvation quickly comes with the siege. 8,000 had died.

There in Ellenberg, a pastor named Martin Rinkert watched as all the town council died, then Rinkert's wife died, next the other pastors of Ellenberg died. He was the only church leader left and so was asked to preside over funerals of townspeople—200 at a time. Finally, after wakes, after suffering behind every door in town, he sat down to wonder, to find sense amidst the death. These words came to him: "Now thank we all our God, / With heart and hands and voices; / Who wondrous things has done, / In whom this world

rejoices." "Keep us in all grace, / And guide us when perplexed, / And free us from all harm, / In this world and the next." May Rinkert's words guide you the next days.

Remember, as people of faith, the symbols we lifted up this morning. And also, remember this symbol: on the night when He was betrayed, he took the loaf, from a plate, blessed it and broke it, gave it to those at the table, saying "Take, eat, this is my body broken for you." After their meal, he took their cup, held it out before them, saying "the cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of a world of sin. Take these, remembering me, take these to find hope."

We dwell in places of *fear and trembling*; places prone to *false hope and exaggeration*,. Go out into the world, just like the 11 must have gone out, face a world almost paralyzed and stripped of hope. Go with the memory that He will walk alongside. While we might not recognize him at first, look for him, in the lives of those you know, in your own life, in places you never before thought to look,. Go, be hopeful, be loving, be whom God calls you to be. He is risen. Alleluia. Amen..