

April 20, 2025 EASTER: Hope for All Creation!

Matthew 28:1-10 NRSVUE

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,
for 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 worshiped him.

Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid;
go and tell my brothers and sisters to go to Galilee;
there they will see me.”

This is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God!

Oh Friends, I'm saying it again, Christ is Risen!

Congregation responds: He is risen indeed! Amen!

Today, we gather not only to proclaim that Christ is risen,
but to proclaim that in *His* rising, *hope* has risen—

- hope for all people,
- hope for all creation,
- hope for all generations.

We know the tomb was empty.

Love has triumphed over death.

Hope has the final word.

And you know what? This hope...it's for **everyone**.

No one is excluded.

No corner of creation is untouched by this triumphant, cosmic event!

Our scripture this morning from Matthew is filled with
mystery & movement, with fear & awe,
but most of all...it is filled with **hope**.

Let's remember the scene: It's early. Dawn.

That thin veil between night and day, between sorrow and joy,
Between death and life.

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary come—still grieving, still afraid—
to the tomb.

But what they encounter is something they never expected:
an earthquake, an angel, and a stone rolled away.

And then—those powerful words spoken by the angel of the Lord:
“*Do not be afraid.*”

*He is not here, for he has been raised,
Just as he said he would.*”

And then another mind-blowing encounter—

Jesus himself appears and also says to them:

“*Do not be afraid*” and adds immediately: “*Now GO and tell...*”

But I want to pause a bit on those powerful first words shared by both the angel and Jesus: “Do not be afraid!”...

the “Opening Prelude” if you will...to Resurrection.

Friends, throughout scripture, “Do not be afraid” is *never* said lightly.

These words or slight variations occur almost 400 times in the Bible.

It shows up when God is about to do something *world-shifting*.

To Abraham, to Moses, to Mary & Joseph,

to the disciples on a storm-tossed sea...

and now to these two grieving women at the tomb.

It’s God’s way of saying: *Get ready. Everything is about to change.*

And here's some truth...

We need to hear “*Do not be afraid*” precisely *because* hope is risky.

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- Hope threatens to reorient our whole lives.
- Hope asks us to release what we thought was final.
- Hope calls us to see the world not as it is, but as it *could be*.

It’s been my experience that sometimes we don’t fear change...
as much as we fear *loss*.

Now THAT’S real isn’t it?

We know what we’ve been holding on to—

even if it’s grief, anger, doubt—

it’s familiar, maybe we’ve grown comfortable with it.

~But the Resurrection invites us to loosen our grip on despair
and **dare** to believe in a future we can't yet see.

~The Resurrection invites us to fear not, **and** trust in the promises of God, of a life filled with surprises and endless possibilities.

I read a powerful story of a family in Ukraine, who returned to their bombed-out neighborhood in Kharkiv (kaar-keev). Their home was gone. Rubble everywhere.

But in the wreckage, the mother of this family knelt down, moved debris, dug her fingers into the earth, and planted sunflower seeds.

I then remembered the sunflower is the national flower of Ukraine. It's a symbol of the country's resilience and beauty, a flower that can thrive in all different kinds of conditions.

When someone asked this woman why she planted seeds in her destroyed home, she simply said:
"Because spring will come."

Friends, planting hope in the rubble of despair and pain, is an act of **holy defiance**.

It's Resurrection living...

Its seeds of hope in the faith of God's promise of new creation.

You know...the resurrection didn't happen in front of a crowd.

It wasn't announced with trumpets—no!

It started small—just a message given to two women, and then shared person by person by person.

And just like that...

Hope spreads like seeds. Quiet Hope.

Persistent Hope. Transformative Hope.

The Risen Jesus didn't go to Rome or the Temple in Jerusalem—

He went to Galilee. Back to the margins. Back to the community.

That's how Resurrection works. That's where hope takes root.

In fact, I think planting seeds is one of the best metaphors we have for what Resurrection looks like today.

Every act of love, every moment of forgiveness,
every decision to speak up for justice,
every opportunity to care for creation,
to teach the next generation, to welcome the excluded,
to *keep showing up*—THESE...these are *seeds of hope*.

Over these past Lenten weeks my devotional readings gave me challenges and spiritual insights...and images of “seeds” kept showing up.
I've learned to pay attention when that happens!

I want to share a powerful story I read,
it's all about choice, & opportunities we all have each day before us...
to impact our lives and impact a hurting and needy world.

A woman, weary from the world's pain, walks into a store
and finds Jesus behind the counter.

"So, what do you sell here?" she asks.

“Oh, just about everything,” Jesus says. “What are you looking for?”

So she enthusiastically makes a list:

Oh I definitely want peace on earth, an end to war, food for all, clean air.
I would love restored families, thriving children,
And beloved communities where all are welcome.”

Jesus smiles & nods, takes her list, and soon returns with small packets.

She looks confused. “What are these?”

“Seeds,” he replies. “This is a catalog store.

You don't get the finished product. You plant the seeds.

You nurture them. You water them. You work with others.

And in time, well God brings the harvest...
a harvest to share with others.”

The woman looks at Jesus,
then at all the seed packets spread out before her.
She looks up again to Jesus and says softly, “Oh.”
And then...she leaves the store. Empty-handed.

Friends, far too often I think we're tempted to leave
without taking seeds of hope that are being offered by Jesus every day.

And I think this happens for all kinds of reasons.

- This isn't what I thought it would be...
- I'm just so exhausted...for even one more thing.
- Besides, I do not have a green thumb, in fact I don't know how to plant anything let alone hope seeds like peace or justice, compassion or forgiveness...
- If I'm being honest, I'm afraid of what may spring forth...
- I really don't have the time, or patience for this...
- I didn't know I had to work so hard...
- I thought it was only a harvest that I was going to enjoy...
I'm supposed to share it?

Oh. You know Jesus this is just a bit too much, so no.

No...thank you.

And then we leave choose to leave without taking any seeds with us.

But friends, Easter calls us to *stay*,
to *take the seeds*, and *start planting*—
even when we're not sure of the harvest.

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary planted hope by *going*—
by sharing the good news of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And the rest of the disciples?

They took that hope, and scattered it across the world.

Matthew's Gospel ends with Jesus's Great Commissioning...

A sending forth of the disciples—

“Go! Get out and make disciples!

Train everyone far and near in this Way of Life,

In this hope-filled, Resurrection Life of New Creation for ALL.

And friends...now it's our turn.

FMC's vision is to **be relevant to our community,**

impact all generations, and embody radical acceptance of all.

Do you know what that means in Easter terms?

It means we are a *Resurrection people*.

People called to plant seeds of hope in a world
that too often feels lifeless and spent.

- We plant seeds when we welcome someone who's been told they don't belong.
- We plant seeds when we stand up for justice.
- We plant seeds when we teach our children that love is stronger than hate.
- We plant seeds when we care for this Earth—
God's beloved world—because hope is not just for *us*,
it's for *all* creation, all living creatures and plants,
and seas and the very air we breathe.

As we leave this Easter morning—

We too have the chance to receive seeds of hope.

We have small gift bags that include this seed packet (hold up). **SLIDE**

It's a simple gift, but it carries a sacred challenge.

Friends, Take them. Plant them. Nurture them.

Be patient with them.

Watch and wait to see what flower will bloom.

Let them be a reminder that we are all called to be sowers of hope.
You may not see the full bloom, but resurrection isn't always instant—
It's a season. It's a process. It's a promise of God's new creation...
that comes in surprising, and beautifully diverse ways.

As we go into a world still aching with divisiveness, war, injustice,
and fear—remember: Jesus is alive.

Love has defeated death.

Hope is real. AND IT BEGINS WITH US.

So hear it once more:

Do not be afraid.

Plant seeds of love, justice, forgiveness, respect, kindness, & peace—
(To name just a few)...PLANT SEEDS of God's possibilities...

Live the hope.

And Do Not Be Afraid...

Christ is risen! Christ is Risen indeed!

Amen and amen.