

The Easter Earthquake!
Easter, April 12, 2020
Pastor Barnes
Text: Matthew 28:1-10 plus: 11-15

Blessed Easter morning to you all! Before we begin...I have to say, I am really getting tired and worn looking out at an empty congregation! Although for your safety and for Easter to come, it is good that it be so!

So...now I am going to use my imagination...and I ask you to do the same!

We are going to use the traditional Easter Morning greeting of shouting...He is Risen! And you respond: "He is Risen indeed! I will say the first part and then I am going to imagine and wait!

Ready: "He is Risen! (**He is Risen indeed!**)

In my heart and mind, I heard you--could be louder, but that is okay!

Let's share an Easter Prayer:

The earth shook and the stone, by an angel, was rolled away. The sting of death has forever been taken away. For that we do shout in our hearts: "He Is Risen Indeed!"

We pray the world as earthquakes happen, both real and in human hearts, would bring peace and hope...realizing that death has lost its sting.

So we continue to pray in confidence and hope that healing will be brought to our world as we move through these tempestuous times. Especially COV-19

We pray that from the compassion, caring and giving we have witnessed, hearts will be changed even beyond this virus!

We pray that the earthquake of God's power will continue to change hearts and bring more people together in peace and understanding.

We pray in hope that Easter is not a day, but a state of being. Change our hearts O God! Amen.

When in high school, I worked summers on a farm. The most strenuous and also enjoyable was the bailing of hay. Straw I got \$1.00 per hour...if Hay (heavier), I got a whopping \$1.25! After the cut alfalfa dried, a hay rake windrows the hay into straight paths and then comes the baler. Attached to the baler was a hay wagon to which we threw (much younger) and stacked the bales before taken to the barn.

There was joy in being outside...but there is a "smell" to fresh cut hay that is difficult to describe. It was a kind of peaceful feeling...new life! By the way...you also had to remember to wear LONG SLEEVED shirts or your arms really got terribly scratched up!

From Palm Sunday and the Passion of Christ. Jesus followed a path. It led the crucifixion...but also a love and peace we know as Easter.

Stan Tordsen wrote: In the Bible, God "windrows" a path for our lives also.

This path leads to eternal life. Now we just have to follow.

Psalm 25 is quoted 8-10

“Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant.”

Early morning, first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the tomb.

Following the path of this world to prepare His body. BUT an earthquake changed things! The earth shook, the stone rolled away and an angel sat on top of the stone.

TWO very different things happened: The guards there “became like dead men.” No path there!

The women were told...”don’t be afraid, Jesus goes ahead of you, He has been raised.” For them, the path was clear and the aroma was like that of fresh baled Hay! New life and beautiful! Still fearful...but now also great joy!

Did you know: This is the only translation that has an “earthquake” and the power of God by an Angel in the story.

I want you to think of this Easter Earthquake in several ways:

- a. The earth shook...it happens in our day. Buildings fall and lives are changed as the tectonic plates slide underneath each other.
- b. People’s hearts shake and change...a crisis happens and all that you thought you knew changes in an instant. Like sitting in an ICU waiting room for the time when you can go back and see your loved one.
- c. The earthquake of people who have to have things their way....and compassion, forgiveness and love is lost in the darkness.

This Easter Earthquake scared the heck out of the women and the guards...but with two totally different reactions.

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary had their fear turned to joy because their FAITH was answered. The Angel, the power of God brought hope back to life.

For the guards...it says quite clear they laid their “like dead men.” For me that says: their hearts were hardened and this was beyond the pale of belief.

Our world is traversing a terrible time of the unknown in this virus. An earthquake of sorts! We cannot change that. But the path of hope and faith and joy will see us through.

A different path than the world. You think hope is difficult...at times it is. If easy and attainable it might not be called hope.

Earthquakes happen all the time in our world and are of all types...

The earthquake of a rejection letter.

The earthquake of a failed relationship.

The earthquake of failed health.

The earthquake of a job you had, that now is gone.

The earthquake of a person you depended upon that now becomes absent.

The earthquake of some people who just seem to like to shake things up....no matter feelings or consequences.

There are A LOT of “earthquakes” in our world that shake US up!

Listen to what you didn't hear this Easter Morning: Just a couple of verses from Matthew further on: Matthew 28:11-15

While they were going (the women), some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priest everything that had happened. After the priests had assembled with the elders, they devised a plan to give a large sum of money to the soldiers, telling them, "You must say, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.' If this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." So they took the money and did as they were directed.

A very different path...A path of not wanting to pick up those "bales of hay" at all with the smell of new life. The only aroma they smelled was staying out of trouble and money to misrepresent the truth.

Like Pilate, willing to keep the things of this world as people pushed and pulled at him ...asking Jesus...well, "What is Truth?"

Do you remember? John 18:37-38: *Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered: "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."*

Pilate asked him, "What is truth?"

OUR truth we know in the earthquake joy of the empty tomb. This truth is an earthquake that is too upsetting for those whose only world is this world.

This Easter morning...The earth heaves, and an angel mightily rolls back the stone....

At this point, we might expect Jesus to rise and sally forth in victory from the tomb, much as the way his friend Lazarus did in John 11.

But the resurrection has ALREADY taken place, in the darkness, while the tomb was still sealed!

The power and love of God does not need an earthquake!

But sometimes we need something to shake us awake to the Resurrection truth.

Sometimes teachers had to shake me out of my "daydreaming" to start learning.

Sometimes a friend had to shake me out of my fear to move forward and not back up.

Sometimes like the guards on that Easter morning....it is easier to "lay like dead men," and pretend that nothing has happened and nothing has changed.

On this grand day we wish we could gather in celebration! Not only of the empty tomb but of our full hearts together!

Isn't it interesting that the earthquake is post resurrection...Nobody actually saw it! But which God wants everyone to know about.

Maybe this "stay at home" time, is kind of like that first Easter Morning! An earthquake of separateness and shaking our "norms"...but God still wanting us to spread the good news.

All we know about the resurrection of the crucified Jesus from the dead is the aftermath. But the aftermath...like any earthquake, changes everything.

The way the New Testament scholar N.T. Wright puts it is: *"Jesus is raised, so God's new creation has begun - and we, his followers, have a job to do!" (Surprised By Hope)*

The resurrection is not simply the resuscitation of the dead body of Jesus.

Resurrection is the first act, the launching pad for God's new creation.

As Paul says, the resurrection of Jesus is the "first fruits" of what God plans to do in all creation, Transforming the world, moving from death to life, Until the glory of the Lord will fill the earth as the waters cover the sea.

This is the first of act of Revelation 21... *"where the one who sits on the throne says: And now I make all things new!"*

That is some Earthquake!! AND we are asked to keep "shaking" up the world with this good news.

One last thing: Christmas...for God so loved! Christmas, you say! Yes! Angels were involved then also.

The Angel said to the shepherds...."do not be afraid!"

Sound familiar?

Then the whole host of angels sang: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

THIS was the beginning of the earthquake of good news!

This was the truth that Jesus proclaimed.

The resurrection is the core of Christian belief.

A nonnegotiable datum that detonated the explosion....an earthquake....sending the church out into the world.

Just like the women and disciples on that first day of the week.

So we shout and **SHAKE THE WORLD** with this phrase:

"He is Risen! And He is Risen indeed!"

Amen and Blessed Easter!