

## Matthew 28:1-10 “An Uprising of Love”

At a glance, Israel isn't much different from the Northern Sacramento Valley. Especially around Jerusalem. It's actually more like Orland or Corning or Red Bluff than Chico, but the climate is very similar. It can get *really* hot in the summer, and the winters can get pretty cool. In fact, if you can believe it, Jerusalem gets more snow than Chico. The weather forecast for Jerusalem today said that it's cloudy and the high was going reach 68. The low this morning was 53. So it's about what it *typically* is here in Chico this time of year ... today being an exception of course. So it's not hard to imagine that not-quite-dark, “pre-dawn chill” sort of morning when Mary Magdalene and “the other Mary” visited the garden where Jesus' body had been laid.

Then ... *another* relatable California thing happened, although it doesn't happen much this far inland: There was a great earthquake. But the cause of this earthquake wasn't a shift in the fault line. This one was caused by an angel rolling away the stone that covered Jesus' tomb. And there the angel sat on top of that stone. This wasn't one of those messengers from God who comes and goes and people say, “Wait ... was that an angel we just saw?” This was one of those other-worldly-looking beings whose “appearance was like lightning and his clothing was as white as snow.” Or as they say in the Appalachians, “He ain't from around here.” There was no doubt who or what this was, or where this angel came from, or why this angel was here.

I'm glad this is a “Matthew Year” in this little three-year, rotating scripture cycle that we call the “lectionary.” I love Matthew's take on the empty tomb. It's funny, Mark's gospel has the angel appearing as a young man sitting *in* the tomb wearing a white robe. Like I was saying earlier, this is one of those cases where you have to say, “Wait a minute. Is this an angel?” Then you've got Luke's gospel who has *two* men in “dazzling apparel” inside the tomb. Their “bedazzled” appearance gives them away. “Yeah ... these guys are more than likely angels.” John's gospel has only Mary Magdalene who ran to tell the disciples when she

sees that the stone had been rolled away. But she comes back and Jesus himself greets her, but only after she saw two ... I don't know "average" looking angels in white. But Matthew's gospel? Matthew's angel? This angel was so impressive that the two soldiers who were assigned to guard the tomb passed out on the spot. And not just stunned either, they were out cold ... "like dead men." Matthew wants his readers to know that this event was a *big deal*.

Matthew tells us that these two women came, not to witness Jesus' resurrection, but to visit his tomb. They came to mourn the loss of their beloved leader and teacher – to honor him in his death. Jesus had spoken of dying and rising again, but his followers didn't always get what he was saying. See, *they* expected the Messiah to be victorious over Rome. They didn't expect him to be the *victim* of Rome. And that's exactly what Jesus' trial and crucifixion looked like. So they probably dismissed what Jesus had said earlier and thought, "How could one who raised the dead, die himself?" And if they did get around to thinking about any sort of resurrection, it was only in terms of the common Jewish belief that all the righteous would be raised on the Last Day. Resurrection was, at best, a distant hope as the women came to the tomb that morning. They came to see a dead man's tomb. They were grieving not just their personal loss – but the loss of hope that things could and would change – that a new life – a better world – was possible.

By the end of Matthew 27 it looked like the Status Quo was firmly in place and in control. Pilate told his soldiers to, "Take a guard and go make the tomb as secure as you know how." So they put their seal on the stone and posted a guard. Jesus and any prospect of change was buried and sealed with their authority. Things could not and would not change. Maybe you know from experience about the limitations

of living within the status quo: You *wish* change was possible but you feel so helpless and hopeless in the face of how it has been and how it is and how it will likely be. You feel stuck in the power of the status quo.

So on that morning, three days after Jesus was killed, these women came to look at the tomb that was sealed with the power and authority of the Empire ... the *masters* of the status quo. But what they saw was something that was overthrown by a *greater* power. The Status Quo was shaken. The stone that was supposed to shut away hope was rolled away. The seal that declared “Things must stay as they are,” was broken. The agents of the Status Quo who had been part of the system that had done its worst to Jesus became like dead men. Jesus – let’s call him the alternative King – was alive. It was a demonstration of intervention. As Paul puts it in Romans 1:4 “Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ our Lord was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead.” Now despite what you may have heard, resurrection isn’t just proof of life after death. Resurrection isn’t some guarantee of going to Heaven when you die. Resurrection is the declaration that Jesus is King. It’s about the outcome of a cosmic clash of authorities. Does the status quo stand? Or is change possible? Does God ... or something else have the final say on us and our world?

I think that’s why the earth shook. That’s why the sealed tomb opened and the agents of the status quo were afraid and left for dead. The old “how it has been and how it must always be” was *gone!* The new order had come. The new order that laid out how it could be and will be with Jesus as the Risen Lord and King. To quote Paul again, the Resurrection of Jesus assures us that “neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, not anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

In our time in history, when we talk about someone or something that challenges the status quo, we call it an “uprising.” In recent times, we’ve seen uprisings in the Middle East like the “Arab Spring” movement. That one started in Tunisia in the last month of 2010 and spread throughout Egypt, Libya, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan. Young people in these countries stood up and challenged the old status quo that kept people in their place by force.

They demanded a new system where the people who had long been underneath the boot heel of the powers that be could rise up and be heard.

“Okay ... but Jesse ... that’s a *political* thing isn’t it? What Jesus did wasn’t *political*. Was it?” But think about it: Jesus’ death and resurrection kick started a “Jesus Movement.” And this movement has lasted for almost 2,000 years. Call it an “uprising of love.” Brian McLaren describes it as, “An uprising that is armed with love not weapons. An uprising of peace, not angry threats of hostility. It’s an uprising of outstretched hands, not clenched fists. It’s the ‘someday’ we have always dreamed of, emerging in the present, rising up among us and within us. It’s so different from what we expected – so much better.”

And it started in the pre-dawn chill of a morning where women came to visit a tomb. A tomb that was found empty. Between sunrise and sunset, the world was changed forever. *Everything* became new. And from that point on, whenever we break bread together ... whenever we share at this table together ... we will know that we are not alone in this uprising of love. The risen Christ is with us and among us. Resurrection has begun. Christ is risen.