

April 16, 2017
Christ is risen! Alleluia!
Jeremiah 31:1-6; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Colossians 3:1-4; Matthew 28:1-10
Christ the King Lutheran Church
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Christ is Risen! Alleluia! Alleluia! Greetings! Καίρετε! Rejoice!
What more is there to say?

You know the story! Just about everyone in this assembly can tell the story. Jesus was born, Jesus healed the sick, raised the dead, gave sight to the blind and set the captives free.

Jesus was arrested, tried, crucified, died and was buried. On the third day he was raised from the dead and we shout for joy! This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it. Καίρετε!

You know the story! But, the story does not end today.

The first evangelist, Matthew tells a breath-taking tale of the last days with Jesus. The triumphal ride into Jerusalem, the Passover meal, the arrest and trial, the crucifixion and death on the shameful cross. And, the sorrowful waiting for daybreak when the women could attend to the body of the teacher they followed and loved.

This story has been told for centuries. The telling has frequently diminished the importance of some of the disciples the women. Especially Mary of Magdala.

According to Matthew's account, all of the men who had followed Jesus had fled in fear, with good reason. They were known associates of the criminal Jesus and feared that they would suffer the same fate as the teacher.

The women remained at the cross, looking on from a distance in relative safety. They watched as Joseph of Arimathea took the body of Jesus, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own tomb. They watched as Joseph rolled a great stone over the door of the tomb. These two grief stricken disciples, Mary of Magdala and the other Mary sat opposite the tomb, weeping, watching, waiting.

While they waited in the darkness, a group of political and religious leaders gathered to hatch another plot against the followers of Jesus. The religious leaders must have been paying attention. They went to Pilate and reminded him what "the imposter, Jesus" had said "after three days I will arise". So, they asked for the tomb to be secured and guarded, otherwise his disciples might steal the body and lie to the people that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Pilate told the soldiers to go seal the stone and guard the tomb.

All four evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John begin the resurrection account in the same way:

It was the first day of the week, early in the morning and Mary Magdelene went to the tomb. Mary Magdelene!

Not Peter,
not James,
not John,
not Philip,
not Andrew,
not Thomas,
none of the 11.

It was Mary of Magdala who was first to the tomb.

Matthew's telling of the early morning scene is chaotic! There is an GREAT earthquake. An angel appears like lightening, in clothing as white as snow and sits on the stone. The guards, shaking in their boots fall down like dead men. The angel speaks those famous angel-words "don't be afraid"! Don't freak out! Jesus is not here! He has been raised, just like he told you he would be. Come on in and see for yourselves."

Then the angel delivers my favorite line of the resurrection story: "Go QUICKLY and tell the disciples Jesus has been raised from the dead!" GO QUICKLY AND TELL!

The women are off and running! Fearful AND filled with joy! Suddenly! Right there in front of them is Jesus!

Καίρετε! Greetings! he says to them!

Can you imagine? Then he says exactly the same thing the angel said: Do not be afraid! Stop being afraid! Go, tell the disciples to go to Galilee, I will be there! Adrenaline pouring through their guts, the women race to tell the disciples.

Meanwhile, back in Jerusalem, the chief priest and the elders have a meeting with the freaked-out guards. Once again, they are trying to figure out a way to discredit the witness of the disciples to the resurrection. The religious leaders are terrified of the Roman leaders. Large sums of money change hands. They instruct the soldiers to lie and say that the disciples came in the night and stole the body while the soldiers slept.

And the women run to tell the disciples that Jesus Christ is no longer dead! Joy to the world! Christ is Risen!

With racing hearts, sweaty palms and quavering voices, who will we rush to tell?

What price are we willing to pay?

What Empire are we willing to defy?

What scorn are we willing to endure?

Do not be afraid!

Go quickly and greet the world with the joy-filled news!

"καίρετε!

Rejoice!

Christ is Risen! Alleluia! Alleluia!