

“Stories that Matter - Resurrection” by Pastor Leah Rosso

Easter Sunday, April 5, 2026

Matthew 28:1-10

I love the confidence of the Gospel of Matthew. I realize that when you come to worship on Easter it probably sounds like the same story every year, but the truth is that if you go home and read the four different accounts of the resurrection story, you'll find four different perspectives, tones, and details about that morning. Like siblings or cousins retelling stories of their youth, each Gospel writer has their own focus, their own flair, their own perspective on the story. And Matthew is by far the most dramatic, the loudest, and the most confident. I'm glad we have brass playing this morning, because definitely in Matthew's resurrection there was brass; in fact, if Matthew were telling the story today, I'm sure there'd be a swelling orchestra, some iconic soundtrack like in Star Wars or Dune or Black Panther.

Let me show you what I mean. Matthew begins his resurrection story with the women going to the tomb, just like the others, but when they arrive, there's an earthquake! It's unclear whether the earthquake is caused by the angel rolling the stone away, or whether it happens at the same time, but either way it's pretty epic. The angel's appearance, we are told, is like lightning and apparently the angel is so scary or at least intimidating looking that the Roman guard - the toughest men in the world at that time - began to shake and then fainted. And just in case you didn't get the reference that the Roman guard looks small compared to God's glory, the angel takes the opportunity to sit on the boulder he has just rolled away. This enormous rock that is supposed to seal a tomb so that the disciples won't steal the body, is used as a chair for the angel to look on as the women enter the tomb and find that Jesus is not there.

I have to admit, I've always thought this resurrection story was a bit over the top. The others have a quiet, even dark resurrection as the women encounter an empty tomb. Matthew doesn't dwell on the trauma Jesus' followers would have experienced with his death two days before, and because of that I always thought that in some ways this resurrection story dismisses the grief, making it seem like all has been set right with the world, as though resurrection makes up for all that has happened the week before.

But this year I heard the story a bit differently. Maybe it's because next week we're starting a series on Robin Wall Kimmerer's book in which she lays out evidence that creation is all working together, but I began to think about the meaning behind the words of what Matthew is saying. In the Gospel of Matthew there are earthquakes on Palm Sunday, Good Friday, and on Easter. And I think they are meant to reveal to us that earth and heaven are in cahoots together; that all creation is affected by the sin of governments that are bent on destruction rather than life. We can relate to that, can't we? We see how our earth is suffering because of decisions we as a society are making. Matthew does too. Also, as a symbol, an earthquake is a pretty good indicator that things are literally being shook up! If you've ever lived through an

earthquake, then you know that they are disruptive; disturbing; and that they disorient people, even those who seemingly are used to them. And so is the resurrection story. It's not meant to be thought of as normal. This is a story that is disruptive both to the Roman government that is intent on death being the final word, but also disruptive to the disciples and the followers of Jesus. Resurrection? Who would've thought of that. What does it mean to them? What do we do with it?

When a story becomes familiar, it's easy to stop listening to it; or to think it was cleaner than it was. It's so easy for us to tell this as a story where it seemed like the end of the world and then God surprises everyone. But the truth is, it didn't seem like the end of the world to those who lived through it; it was the end of the world. There's no "seeming like" to those who witnessed Jesus' death. There's no "April fools!" surprise for the disciples who had given up their lives to follow Jesus only now to be terrified that they too would be crucified. It is the end of the world as they know it and they do not feel fine. They feel like an earthquake has shaken everything they've ever known and understood.

In Drew Jackson's book, "God Speaks through Wombs" he writes,

I have been told that
mystery is not what is unknowable,
but what can be infinitely known.

The fog remains
for those who refuse to search —
for those who walk away without explanation,
frustrated with the riddle of life.

The fog does remain for those Roman guards, who we can trust eventually woke up. But for those who went seeking Jesus, for the women who did not faint but rather followed the words of the angel even when they didn't understand, they begin to see what it means to keep following Jesus- even after death; even after resurrection.

You see resurrection isn't about belief. This is where the church has gotten it wrong over the years, stressing that all of us must conform to some thought process as though what God cares most about is what conclusions we come to. No, the resurrection is about the power of God to bring life where we have only been able to see death. The resurrection is about a rag tag group of people who chose, in the midst of the greatest mystery of their lives, to keep following Jesus even though they hardly recognized him anymore. The resurrection is a beginning, not an ending, because for those who had lived and ministered with and followed Jesus, they too would experience resurrection as they began to do the things that Jesus did and create community and practice justice and experience their own resurrection even in the midst of mystery about how it would yet unfold. What is most mysterious about the resurrection is that it can be infinitely known in our lives today because God has been at work this whole time and is not done with us yet.

I wish I could say that resurrection is something we can tap into or access or even control; that there's some formula when you have experienced way too much death to say the magic words and experience it for yourself. But I'm not going to lie to you. It's not up to us. There were many days before that one and many days since when people who love God would've liked for God to bring resurrection and it didn't happen. But that doesn't mean it never happens. What I do know, is that it still happens. That I've seen it as we've lived and ministered and followed Jesus together. We've seen it in each others' lives as we've seen healing where we thought was only illness; forgiveness where we thought there could only ever be resentment; new life in places we had only experienced death. We don't get to say when or where, but we do get to witness that it is happening. God is still resurrecting us and the angel is still encouraging us — go back; tell the others; gather together; break bread; they may not believe you, but keep telling your stories. Because your stories of resurrection point to the love and hope and life that God holds so dear. Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed.