

April 20, 2003
AM Service – Easter Sunday
Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

“The Greatest Event!”

Matt 28:1 - 20

1 After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

2 There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. 4 The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

5 The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. 6 He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

8 So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

11 While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. 12 When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, 13 telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' 14 If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." 15 So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

CHRIST IS RISEN! I am convinced! I have faith that Christ was dead and He was buried. That I believe. But, this too I accept as true: He rose from the dead and will come again in glory. This is Easter. And to stand here on this day in this pulpit and proclaim this word. . . I cannot begin to tell you how this defines all that I am. But, you will say to me, how do you know that the resurrection is real?

I believe in the resurrection because it has stood the test of time.

I believe in the resurrection because I have experienced it.

And every Easter I stand at this pulpits and try to do the best I can to report on this greatest event in all of history. It is like a story I heard...

Red Smith, famous sportswriter, related the following incident about novelist and film writer, Laurence Stallings. Though not a sportswriter, Stallings took an assignment to cover a football game between the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Illinois.

The year was 1925. Halfback Red Grange was dazzling. On a muddy field, where everyone else was slipping and falling, Grange broke loose for three touchdowns and set up another. Experienced sportswriters in the press box furiously pounded away at their typewriters. Not Stallings. In a tizzy, he paced up and down the press box, hands clasped to his head. "I can't," he wailed. "I can't write it! It's too big."

That's the way many of us preachers feel on Easter Day. How can we preach about it? It's too big! Even the most gifted of preachers cannot do justice to this central earth-shattering event that has changed the course of all history. It's too big.

I can't say everything that needs to be said. We'd be here all day – all week. Don't worry. I'm not going to do that. What I am going to do is share with you, in a reasonable amount of time, ... (just a few great things about this greatest event in history)
[Rev. Dr. Robert J. Bryan, Sermon: The ABC's of the Resurrection]

After the women left the tomb the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. They were probably looking for a bribe and it worked. The religious leaders got together and devised a plan, which included giving a large sum of money to the soldiers that had been guarding the tomb. The soldiers were to say that during the night while they were sleeping some of the followers of Jesus came and stole the dead body. Since falling asleep while on guard duty meant punishment even death for the guards, the religious leaders promised that if the governor found out about it they would satisfy the governor and keep the guards out of trouble. The soldiers agreed took their money and when Matthew wrote this gospel some 30 to 50 years later the story was still being circulated. Perhaps this is why Matthew immediately tells of an appearance by Jesus in Galilee.

On the night Jesus celebrated the Passover with His apostles He told the eleven apostles to meet Him in Galilee after He had risen (I say 11 because Judas had already left to betray Jesus).

(Matt 26:31-32) Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written:

"I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered."
But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."

The eleven obeyed Jesus by going to a certain mountain in Galilee where Jesus told them to go. There they worshipped Jesus as their God and Savior (though some, like Thomas,

doubted because they didn't figure on a resurrection from the dead). A small band of His followers had seen Him in Jerusalem in private meetings or appearances. But in this place more people could see Him yet, since it was in a secluded place in Galilee, they would be safe from persecution from the Jews. This certain mountain may very well have been the place where more than 500 saw Jesus at the same time (as recorded by Paul).

(1 Cor 15:3-6a) For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time....

More than 500 people gather at this place of tender memories since it very possibly is where Jesus gave His Sermon on the Mount. Apparently the meeting was arranged beforehand in this previously designated spot. The 500 must have gathered in eager expectancy...waiting. *Then*, suddenly, He became visibly present where a moment before He had been unseen. Perhaps coming down the hill drawing near to them stopping just far enough from them so all 500 could see Him "at the same time." Doubts vanish as they listen to Him in silent awe and love.

Then (v.18-20) Jesus gave what we commonly call the Great Commission: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

What I want to do this morning is to look at these words of Jesus to point out some of the great results of the greatest event. Because of the Resurrection there is:

1. A Great Claim: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." Jesus has *all* authority and that authority is *in heaven* and *on earth*. No words can more absolutely express unconditional, unlimited authority and sovereignty.

The word authority here is used to mean the power of rule or government," the power of one whose will and commands must be obeyed by others (from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright (c)1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers)

Jesus has authority over heaven and earth, which implies divine status. He has "all authority" -- that is, nothing is outside of His sovereign control. The major message here is that Jesus, the one raised from the dead, has the authority of God himself. When satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, Satan had offered "all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor" (Matt 4:8). Jesus resisted the temptation, obeyed God to the point of a horrible death, and was raised again in victory to receive all authority over heaven and earth -- something Satan could never have given because it was never his in the first place.

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Notice also that it is implied that this authority was given at a definite point in time. *When* was it given? That question is answered in Rom 1:4 ...declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead....

Paul also wrote: Phil 2:8-11

...He humbled himself
and became obedient to death-
even death on a cross!

9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

And in Heb 2:9 we read: ... we see Jesus ... now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death...

Jesus has all authority and reigns over heaven and earth and in 2 Tim 2:12 it says: if we endure (in our faith in Him), we will also reign with him.

Second, because of the Resurrection there is:

2. A Great Commission: "...make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

Jesus wants all people from all nations to be His (obedient) followers and commissions those who put their faith in Him with the task of making others His followers.

The Great Claim that Jesus is God having all authority puts an obligation on us; first to believe in Him by accept Him as our Savior for the forgiveness of sins. And to make Him our Lord by obeying all that He commands. Then by our words and example we are to make disciples of others teaching them to obey all that He commanded. The resurrection of Jesus proves He is King. The Savior and Lord. You must accept Him as your King. You must willingly surrender your heart, your will to His authority. And when you do you are commissioned, charged with the duty of winning the world for your King.

It was Easter Day, 1973. Uganda groaned under the terror of Idi Amin. Still fresh in young Pastor Kefa Sempangi's memory was a face burned beyond recognition, the sight of soldiers cruelly beating a man, and the horrible sound of boots crushing bones. all for the crime of being Christian. But that Easter of 1973 Sempangi bravely and openly

preached on the risen Lord in his town's football stadium to over 7,000 people. After the service, five of Idi Amin's Secret Police followed Sempangi back to his little church and closed the door behind them. Five rifles pointed at Sempangi's face.

"We are going to kill you for disobeying Amin's orders" said the captain. "If you have something to say, say it before you die." Sempangi, thinking of his beautiful wife and lovely little girl, began to shake. But the risen Lord living in his heart gave him the courage to speak. "Do what you must," he said. "The Word of God says that in Christ I am already dead, and that my real life is hidden with Him in God. It is not my life that is in danger, but yours. I am alive in the risen Lord but you are still dead in your sins. May He spare you from eternal destruction."

The leader looked at Sempangi for a long time. Then he lowered his gun and said, "Will you pray for us?" Sempangi did, and from that day those five officers, now converted through the witness of Sempangi's bravery, protected the pastor with their very lives. [Rev. Dr. Robert J. Bryan from "The ABC's of the Resurrection"]

We are to be disciples or followers of Jesus and tell others about our Lord not matter the cost.

How do we become disciples? By choosing to believe in Jesus and in His death and resurrection. When we do Jesus begins the process of making us like Himself. This is illustrated when we are baptized. Baptism is an outward sign of what we have done in our hearts. That is why we encourage people to be baptized after they believe. In baptism we see symbolically what has happened in reality in our hearts. We turn to Jesus, turning from our old life; the old self being put to death or cleansed (symbolized as we go in the water; then coming out of the water symbolizing becoming) a new person with a clean heart devoted to Jesus.

We are to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (notice it does not say in the *names* but in the *name*. There are not three Gods but a Triune or threefold God. God is a united one. There is one God revealed in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit).

Then the true/authentic follower of Jesus will be known by the life he lives (i.e.) he obeys all that Christ commands in His Word, the Bible. This allegiance to Jesus includes that His followers recruit others to be His followers – teaching them so they in turn can recruit and teach others. Note also that the emphasis is not on creed but on conduct. The emphasis is not on merely learning facts but putting those facts into action.

Finally, because of the Resurrection there is:

3. A Great Promise: "...surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Jesus will always be with His followers. He says, "surely I am..." This denotes certainty. He says, "I am with you always." This means in good times and in bad. And He says, "to the very end of the age." In other words, He will be with us all our days,

even to the accomplishment of the age or to the end of the world. After that we go to be with Him. But notice that the promise comes after a command and is contingent on our obedience to be and to make disciples. If you want to keep Jesus near you, obey Him. Always be doing what He would want you to be doing.

Because of the Resurrection Jesus has all authority. Therefore, we must submit to that authority. And when we do we will have Eternal life. Because He was raised from death to life we who believe will also be raised from death to life. Eternal life is to know and have a personal relationship with God forever. Just as Jesus says to all who follow Him, "Surely I am with you always." There is nothing greater than that!