



## **“Like a Lightning Strike”**

Pastor Andy CastroLang

April 16, 2017

***Easter Sunday***

### **Scripture (NRSV):**

#### ***Matthew 28:1-15***

#### **The Resurrection of Jesus**

**28** After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. **2** And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. **3** His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. **4** For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. **5** But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. **6** He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he<sup>[a]</sup> lay. **7** Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead,<sup>[b]</sup> and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message for you.” **8** So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. **9** Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of 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.”

#### **The Report of the Guard**

**11** While they were going, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests everything that had happened. **12** After the priests<sup>[c]</sup> had assembled with the elders, they devised a plan to give a large sum of money to the soldiers, **13** telling them, “You must say,

‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.’<sup>14</sup> If this comes to the governor’s ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.”<sup>15</sup> So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story is still told to this day.

---

### Footnotes:

- a. **Matthew 28:6** Other ancient authorities read *the Lord*
- b. **Matthew 28:7** Other ancient authorities lack *from the dead*
- c. **Matthew 28:12** Gk *they*

### Sermon:

Many of you have gotten to know me pretty well over the 14 years I have been pastor here at Westminster.

You can get to know people pretty well, if you stick around, invest in the relationship, work through the arguments and disagreements, tearily recall the sad times, fondly remember the happy times...

But every Easter, and I mean EVERY Easter, when I stand before you, I want you give you, share with you, something absolutely astonishing, life changing, amazing and glorious.

And I wonder, how?

How to get past the bunnies, and the eggs?

How to get past the pretty flowers, the springtime sunshine, the colorful balloons, the Easter hats?

How to get to the lightning bolt experience?

How to get beyond all that we think we understand?

- From bulletin covers that reassure us with their similarity to people just like us (Jesus looks *so white* in so much Easter art!)
- To celebrations of new life that go no further than Springtime rebirth. We know Springtime, we love it and wait for it every year. But it is part of the natural order of the earth. It is happy and familiar, the time of birdsong and crocuses.

But, this “bolt out of the blue” experience of the women, that Ondrej read to you from the gospel of Matthew, this morning, IS NOT LIKE THAT.

I don’t believe that the resurrection is part of the natural order of things.

I don’t believe that the resurrection of Jesus is pretty or sweet, cute or funny or adorable.

I do believe resurrection is like a bolt of lightning at your elbow; that flashes, brilliant, dangerous, high voltage: it is terrifying, unexpected, sudden, alarming.

It flashes so bright on your retinas that it leaves you blind.

The resurrection should be like that: it flashes so bright into our minds that it leaves us stunned, our minds blanked out and blinded of all we think we know and have control of...

If I could give you one thing at Easter,  
I would wish to give you this...

- Easter is God at God's wildest.
- Easter is God, in Jesus, turning the world upside down and inside out.
- Easter is God, shaking us so hard that our prejudices, fears, even our comforting pieties, are shaken loose.
- Easter asks us to reimagine the world. To rethink everything we presume to know.

Or, perhaps, Easter is asking us not to think at all.

Rather, experience, in your gut, imagine in your soul; what would happen to you, if you met God in Jesus, ***after God has overthrown death.***

- The absolute finality of death, of entropy, of ending is everywhere and in everything.
- Now imagine yourself in the presence of the Risen One who has overthrown the universal law of death, and stands as the Living One, witness to that shattering power of God.

The risen Jesus as the exemplar of the power of God as Maker...to make and make and make and make....even out of the finality of death.

As a pastor, I sometimes want to throw up my hands and shout: "I don't know what Jesus looked like at the resurrection! I don't know what a resurrection looks like! Stop asking me that!"

Well, from the scant phrases in the gospel of Matthew...we can at least tell that it is a mixture of the terrifying and the mind bending.

The guards are blinded and deadened. The women are overwhelmed. The angelic messenger is a bolt of lightning.

And then, there is the joy. Beyond all common sense, beyond all reason...Jesus is there with the women who are hysterical with delight and they cling to him in love and relief.

Who doesn't want to cling to such wild and unexpected happiness?

But who will believe this?

Again, as a pastor, I know there are many out there who want me to “make sense” of this story...

But it isn't sensible. It is mystical. Mysterious. Alarming even. It is about God the Maker, so therefore it is much more than any words, from me, can say. It is about Creator God creating, so it is going to be hot and bright and scary and wild and....yeah.

Ask any astronomer or cosmologist...creation is hot and bright and scary. And wild beyond our imagining.

So yes, my dear community. I wish you Happy Easter. But it is not a safe wish, or a tame one.

Because Easter is not about bunnies or chocolate eggs, or even the beauty of Spring.

It is about the Creator God creating, in the face of the world's violence, horror, destruction, cruelty.

Creating LIFE. Jesus is God's messenger, and God's message.

**And the message: Creation as God envisions it, life in its fullness, life greater than death, PREVAILS.**

It is hot and bright and even scary. It cannot be stopped, it is wild beyond our imagining. Bribes of guards, lies told throughout town and down the ages...cannot stop it.

THE CREATING GOD: you want to be near, because that is where the joy is, the laughter, the wild hugs, the astonishing revelation of loving re-union and comm-union.

Resurrection is that place of joy and laughter. Resurrection is that place where God is....and it is a place of white-hot wildness; like a lightning strike.

Resurrection is where God is, and where God is, there is life. Resurrection is where God is, and where God is, there is joy.

Easter is about Resurrection.

A joyous Easter to you all.

May it rock your world, may it shake you awake and aware; may it scare you a little bit, too; like a white-hot lightning strike!  
Amen.