



Playing Catch Up

TEXT
Matthew 28:9–10, 16–20

April 3, 2016 — 8:00 a.m. — Sermon by Rev. Zach Walker

Welcome to the Sunday after Easter. I'm not sure what you ended up doing on Easter ... after making your way through the snow. Meredith and I ended up going to two different houses for delicious meals. The first house was close enough to us that we could walk there. The weather was just beginning to clear up, and while it was cold, the clouds were breaking. By the time we were driving to house number two, at about 5:00, the sun was out and it was beautiful. The day had started pretty early in our house — the alarm going off before 6:00 — and we kept saying to each other: "Is it the same day? Nothing about this day feels the same."

It turns out that a change in weather and being awake for a while can make everything feel different in a way that we take for granted on, of all days, Easter. It was almost too poetic to be authentic.

The first Easter, the day of the Resurrection, brought its own reversal; hopes dashed became hopes fulfilled. Fear and disappointment became joy and assurance. Finding the tomb empty, the rumors that Jesus was

in fact risen, it would have totally changed everything they thought had happened — and everything they thought would happen.

Today we begin a sermon series that explores what the Resurrection means. For the first time in over two years, we have our entire pastoral staff — which feels like an Easter or Resurrection miracle in its own right. And each week, we will talk about what the Resurrection means to us.

Today, in short, Resurrection is about a journey. It's about Jesus finding me. It's ultimately about the grace that God, in Christ, already knows I need — we need. So let's talk about that.

Today's Scripture is the Resurrection account in Matthew. One of the reasons I love this telling of the Resurrection is how Jesus first appears. His first word — the first word of Jesus after being raised from the tomb — is not something thunderous, or ominous, or even instructive. The first word is "Greetings!" It is a simple welcome, followed by a statement of concern: "Do not be afraid."

Even in this triumphant moment, Jesus has the ability to show up quietly, giving a simple greeting, and then moves on to give comfort.

I remember when I was in high school I was in a car accident while I was out of town. It was a bit more than a fender bender. The car flipped and rolled several times, and I was, amazingly, unhurt. But my parents didn't know that, because they weren't with me. In fact, my parents got word from the police and the hospital, where I had been taken to run x-rays to be safe. And years later, they still talk about the feeling of not hearing from me for several hours. "All you can do is worry; all you can be is afraid." In the years before cell phones, information traveled differently. I remember when I finally got to use the phone, the first words I said to them: "Hello, Mom and Dad. Don't worry, I'm OK."

Amazing what a simple greeting, assurance not to worry, not to be afraid, can do.

The disciples, however, might have had some thoughts other than relief.

It is important to remember that the disciples, in addition to being confused about why their Savior and Messiah didn't put up much of a fight, were dealing with the fact that they had deserted him.

What they saw, what they knew, was that when Jesus was in

need, they had fled. They weren't exactly to blame for the mess, but they certainly didn't stop it from happening. And their inaction allowed tragedy and loss; it allowed injustice. Jesus was dead, it was partly their fault, and now their hope was in the grave with him.

Life can feel like that sometimes, can't it? Life can feel like a mess, and it isn't entirely our fault, but we didn't exactly take steps to prevent it from happening either. Maybe it's the conversation we always meant to have, but didn't. Maybe it is that moment when we should have stepped in, but we hesitated. Maybe it was that voice in the back of our head that told us what the right thing, the fair thing, the honest thing would be, but we ignored it. There are some days, some weeks, when it just seems like there are a lot of those moments — those moments when the world seems dim; or maybe it is just that in those moments, my heart can feel dim.

I have to imagine the disciples were in a dim place themselves. And into that dim place, Jesus shows up — first in word, and then by his presence.

That's the next part of what the Resurrection means to me. In the Scripture, we find that some people run right into Jesus. He meets women traveling on the road; he just crosses their path. But the disciples have to go seek him. They are told Jesus is alive, but they must go and find him in Galilee.

It is a reminder to me that Jesus works in different ways. There are times when Jesus

meets me on the road, but there are also times when I must go and find him. I admit to the frustration of that. It seems like Jesus should make a little more effort to look at my calendar. But there's something to my going to find Christ in this world, in this life. And there's something about going with others when I look.

Donald Miller, in his book *Blue Like Jazz*, talks about his decision, despite being an introvert, to live in community. He writes: *There is an entire world inside yourself, and if you let yourself, you can go so deep inside it you can forget your way to the surface. Other people keep our souls alive, just like food and water does with our body. ... When I lived alone it was very hard for me to be around people. I would leave parties early. I would leave church before worship was over so I didn't have to stand around and talk. The presence of people would agitate me. I was so used to being able to daydream and keep myself company that other people were an intrusion. It was terribly unhealthy.* (pp. 152, 153)

When Jesus says he'll be in Galilee, what ends up happening is that the disciples go to Galilee together. With each other, they go in search of Jesus, who has gone ahead of them. It's like we are always playing catch up with Jesus, and we need other people to go with us, to encourage us and challenge us along the way.

I love the idea that Jesus has gone ahead of them ... ahead of me. I love the idea that Jesus has prepared a way; that Jesus is waiting for me when I seek him and is there to greet me when I

arrive; and that it is a good idea to get some friends together when I try to find him. "Go to Galilee; there they will see me." And so they went, and they found him there.

So, there's one more thing about this Resurrection story. Not only does Jesus deliver a message about where he will be, but when they showed up, and he was there waiting for them, even after that, they worshipped; *but some doubted*. It's a curious little phrase the author threw in, don't you think? I mean, what did they doubt? Did they doubt that it was really him? Did they doubt that he had really died? Or was it more vague than that? Maybe they just ... doubted.

I think I like that little phrase in there because it leaves room for us. We find the eleven apostles going and worshipping Jesus, and we probably wouldn't be surprised if it said, "The eleven disciples went and found him there, and their hopes were confirmed, and they were all like, 'Yep, that's pretty much what we figured.'" And we would say to ourselves, "Well, sure. They were with Jesus all the time, and here they are encountering their teacher, and all the things they saw were true and real."

But no, we read that the eleven apostles, who spent a ton of time with Jesus and saw incredible things, in the face of the risen Christ, some of them were a little hesitant. Some had doubts.

Because sometimes, that's me. Sometimes — despite everything, despite the ways Jesus shows up, and despite the ways I find Jesus waiting for me, and

despite what I see — there are times in the midst of all of it when I just question. Following Jesus does not mean doubts are just wiped away. In fact, even in front of a resurrected Jesus, there were those among the eleven who doubted.

When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted.

And does Jesus look at them and tell them, “Some of you are doubting, so I’m not interested in talking to you; so this next part isn’t for you”?

No! Jesus assures them that all authority has been given to him. And he instructs them — all of them — to go and teach others what Jesus taught them. And the last thing he tells them is that he will be *with* them — *all* of them.

This is the power of Resurrection. The focus on the story is never on the failures of the disciples, the ways they fall short. And let’s be clear, they do fall short. But the focus in the story is the Resurrection — the power, the miracle and the *presence* of Christ, no matter what else occurs.

So I don’t know where you are coming from today. I don’t know what it is that has brought you here, or who is in your life. But Jesus is interested in you. It might be that he greets you in the journey of life. And it might be that you need to seek him out. I recommend taking some friends with you when you do.

The Resurrection means that our faith is not so much about instructions as it is about relationship. Jesus is still alive. Jesus is with us. Jesus is waiting on us.

And when we arrive, when we catch up, no matter what it is we think — worshipping, doubting or both — Jesus promises presence.

And it all begins with “Greetings! Do not be afraid.”

Will you pray with me?

This sermon was delivered at Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, KS 66208.

The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church’s Web site: www.villagepres.org/sermons.