

“A New World in Galilee”

Sermon by Pastor Renata Eustis

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Matthew 28: 1-10

This world-altering story of the Resurrection of Jesus is told in each of the four Gospels—and they each tell it in a little bit different way. I’m noticing this time how the stone features more prominently in Matthew’s story. Joseph of Arimathea—who buried Jesus--puts him in the tomb. And then he rolls a great big stone in front of the opening.

But apparently that wasn’t enough for the religious authorities because the next day, they go to Pilate—the Roman ruler of the area. They tell him that Jesus had claimed that he would rise again after three days—and that they wouldn’t put it past his disciples to steal the body and tell everyone that he had risen. They convince Pilate to send a guard of Roman soldiers to seal up that big stone tight as a drum—so that nobody could possibly take the body.

But the next morning, Mary Magdalene and Mary go to the tomb, and all heaven breaks loose! There’s an earthquake shaking everything up and an angel who opens up that sealed tomb and moves the great big stone off to the side. I love what happens next—the angel just sits down on the stone. I don’t know about you but I don’t picture angels sitting around—so I love that picture of the angel sitting on the stone. And this angel has a message that is bigger than this stone—Jesus has been raised from the dead.

This was a twist in the story that no one anticipated—maybe it’s a whole *new* story. We draw a lot of strength and comfort from the promise that just like death was not the end for Jesus, it will not be the end for us or the people we love. That promise keeps us going.

But for the first followers of Jesus, that wasn’t the heart of it. What the resurrection of *Jesus* meant was that God’s new world had actually started here on earth. Everything that Jesus said—the kingdom he couldn’t stop talking about—everything that he did in healing and lifting up those who were so pressed down—all of that was really the beginning of something that God was doing on earth. Something that didn’t end on the cross or get sealed up forever in that tomb.

As much as the Romans—and the power-hungry of every time and place—want to keep that new world contained by sealing up the stone, God moves that stone out of the way. And God sends messengers—angels—to sit on that stone and show us how God is active and real and always leading us into more life.

The Resurrection of Jesus became the principle story of the followers of Jesus. It was the story that shaped their lives and the way they saw the world. It still is.

The angel tells the women to go tell the other disciples that Jesus will see them in Galilee. And then Jesus appears to the women on their way to the disciples and says the same thing—“Tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.” Galilee was where they were all from—it was the place of their ordinary, everyday lives.

But it was also the region that had been crushed by the Romans. Galilee was the rebellious region—the place where people didn’t just accept the injustice of the world. They were country

folk—looked down on by the urban elite—but they knew they deserved better. It makes a lot of sense that this was the place where Jesus spread his message of the new world that was coming—a world where people would have what they needed for a dignified life. And it makes a lot of sense that Galilee is the place where Jesus tells the disciples to go—to come together. This is their home but even more than that, this is the place where people are struggling—where people feel they don't matter. This is the place where people who are so pressed down they cannot stand need to hear the good news of Jesus's Resurrection—that God's new world of justice and peace and the fullness of life is also for them—and it is starting now.

We have our own Galilees—and that is where Jesus meets us—that is where—in the power of the Resurrection—we can see God's new world starting.

Many of you have heard that we have been through a legal process trying to get the school system to adequately address our daughter Sarah's special education needs. We learned on Thursday that the hearing officer ruled against us. It was a huge blow—I was stunned. The hearing was not easy but our case was so strong and the school system's presentation of their case was so weak and sloppy. It actually is not in my universe of understanding to see how anyone could have rendered that judgment.

On Thursday, I was thoroughly in the place of Galilee—feeling the full weight of an unjust system that does not put children's needs at the center. Feeling the personal betrayal of school staff and teachers who we thought actually cared. Feeling the verdict that could severely limit Sarah's life.

I wanted to go into my room and scream and cry but the blessing of being a pastor on Maundy Thursday meant that I had to be at the Seder and our Service of Holy Communion. Instead of spinning on the great injustice we had experienced, what a blessing it was to be centered instead in that ongoing story of God leading the people to freedom—and to be fed with the life of Jesus!

I woke up the next morning seeing the world differently—in our own Galilee. If we had won our case, it would have been just an isolated case. We have decided to appeal which takes it into the federal court system. If we win there, it could be that our case will have a wider impact—maybe it will help other families—maybe it's God's new world breaking in.

When we first got the news, I felt like a huge stone was crushing the life out of us but, in the power of the Resurrection, that stone is moved. And there's an angel on top telling us to go back to that place of injustice—and in the power of the Resurrection, to struggle and be part of making God's new world real now.

Today, Hakeem and his whole family will be baptized. It's like we get to experience what happened in the early church—in the Book of Acts—when whole families experienced the power of the Resurrection. Baptism is our participation in Christ's dying and rising. There is really nothing that proclaims resurrection like baptism.

This beautiful family knows a lot about the crushing weight of that grave stone—and they know a lot about Galilee—that place where injustice seems to rule.

There was another baby in this family who we will remember in our prayers. Ava had big, beautiful eyes. Her mother, Jackie remembers how calm she was and how she was always smiling. Jaeda was thrilled to have a sister and she and her brothers loved putting on shows for her—always trying to get her to laugh.

One day, as they were getting ready to leave the house, Jackie found her precious baby unresponsive. At the hospital, instead of being allowed to have the time to hold her baby and say good-bye, Jackie was taken to the police station and interrogated. The crushing weight of the grave stone, made even heavier by the injustice of Galilee.

Grief took a heavy toll on them all but through it they kept going, even when it seemed like everything was unraveling. They were led to this place and to this day. Hakeem says that if it weren't for Ava, they wouldn't be here. They call Ava their little angel. Today, God has unsealed that great big gravestone and rolled it away.

And, today, I'm picturing an angel named Ava smiling and sitting on that stone, with a message for us all: "The life that Jesus has brought into this world cannot be sealed up and contained by death or the power-hungry of this world. It cannot be crushed by pain or injustice.

*You are a part of God's new creation—today!"*

Thanks be to God. Amen.