



Easter, April 4, 2010
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Go Away! Matthew 28:1-10

Welcome to Easter at Chapel Hill. Listen now to the best news ever written:

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. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴The 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. ⁶He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷Then 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. ⁹Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”*

I’ve been to Israel seven times. One of my most precious moments was on my last trip. On our final day, my son Cooper and I got up before dawn for one more walk into the Old City. We went to the Western Wall and prayed there with thousands of Jews. Then Cooper said, “Dad...do you think we could go see the empty tomb one more time?” I said, “Sure... if we run.” So Cooper and I ran, laughing, through the deserted streets of Jerusalem until we came to the empty tomb of Jesus.

On that first Easter morning, two disciples went to Jesus’ tomb. But they did not run. And they were not laughing. The faithful Marys returned to finish preparing his body. But they didn’t get the chance. Because there was no body. At least no dead body. There were soldiers who looked like dead bodies. And there was an angel reclining on the top of a rock like it was a Lazy Boy. And then... there was Jesus...alive and well.

The angel **and** Jesus both had the same message for the women. We can sum it up in one word, a word found four times in our short text. Did you hear it? **Go!**

“Go quickly and tell his disciples” that Jesus is alive,” the angel said. Now...let’s pause there for a moment. Should this have been a big surprise to the disciples? Back in Matthew 16, Jesus and his disciples took a vacation to Caesarea Philippi. *“From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law,and that he must be killedand on the third day be raised to life!”*

Now, could Jesus have been any clearer? “Listen, boys. We are heading to Jerusalem and I am going to be arrested, tortured, killed...it’s okay, Peter...cool your jets...it’s all part of the plan. On the third day, my

heavenly Father will raise me back to life. So, don't worry. But remember ...when the time comes, **I told you!**" Did they remember? And when Jesus died on that cross...they just stopped believing. Such hopes—dashed! No one had ever done what Jesus did. Walk on water, heal the sick, cast out demons, **raise the dead!** Jesus was easy to believe in back then.

But not now. Gethsemane. The cross. The tomb. A dead Messiah. All their dreams were shattered. Everything they hoped for...everything they had bet their lives on...was crushed. And they just stopped believing. They became the "Used-to" Believers. They used to believe—but now they were just broken-hearted men, hiding in a room.

Well ...that room would be Mary's first stop. "Go quickly and tell his disciples," the angel said. Jesus said almost the same thing. But there was one important difference. What? "Go and tell my... **brothers...** that I am alive." Now **Jesus** could have said, "Go tell my disciples." Or he could have said, "Go... tell those cowards." Because that's what they were. Grown men, hiding out, leaving it to the women to clean up the mess. (Of course, we are very brave, 2000 years later, looking down our noses at those **sisy disciples.**) "Go and tell those pansies...those lily-livered losers...that I am alive." Jesus could have said that.

Jesus had every reason to be angry...disappointed. The men he had spent three years with...who had been warned that this was coming... abandoned him. And now they were quivering in a room somewhere. Humiliated. So...what did Jesus call these "Used-to" Believers? **Brothers!** The first "Go!" of Jesus is to his "Used-to" brothers and sisters; those who "Used-to" love him, who "Used-to" followed him...but who had become disheartened and discouraged.

I wonder...are there any "Used-to" Believers here this morning? There was a time when Jesus meant something to you. When you loved him and felt loved back by him; when you were in love with his Church and felt loved back by his Church; when you felt that you had a purpose that was greater than just making a living and paying the bills and buying cool stuff...a purpose that was meaningful and eternal.

And then ...your heart broke. The marriage you thought would last forever, didn't. The kids you raised to love Jesus, don't...yet. Your job disappeared; your house disappeared; your retirement disappeared...your health disappeared. The love of your life ... died. **And you just stopped believing.** Stopped believing that Jesus was real...or that he loved you...or that he was powerful enough to do anything about the stuff that hurting you. You became a "Used-to" Believer.

Earlier this week, our family went to a favorite beach spot near Moclips. It was stormier than I have ever seen it. The tidal surge was huge and angry and lapping away at parts of the beach that are always dry. We decided to go for a walk. I wore rubber boots. Cooper did not. A big surge started in and Coop jumped up on a huge log. Surely he would be safe and dry there. The wave came in and Cooper stood confidently. The wave hit that log...and picked it up like a pencil! Cooper flopped off and ran from the tide like his tail was on fire. The log that seemed so secure... was suddenly being tossed around by the storm.

That happens in life, too, doesn't it? We are standing on what we think is firm ground. Even firm spiritual ground. And suddenly, the storms strike and everything is floating around us and we are scrambling for our lives. And your heart gets broken. God disappoints you. You used to believe. But now...not so much. **You are here today as a courtesy to your family.** But, really, you just don't buy it anymore. Or maybe you just don't DARE buy it anymore. You're a "Used-to" Believer.

Jesus' first, gracious command was, "**Go**...to my once-believing brothers and sisters. Go and tell them that I understand their disappointment and their heartache; why they abandoned me. But I still love them. I still want them. And I really am the Resurrected One who brings life from death. Where else will they turn? Even if they don't see it right now, there IS life after the death they are facing. I should know! And I can lead them to it. Go...tell them that!"

But how does that happen? How do you restore hope when it's been crushed? Well... there is a second "Go." Did you see it? "Go tell my brothers to **go** to Galilee; there they will see me." So...here's another question: **why Galilee?** Why not just meet the disciples in Jerusalem? They are IN Jerusalem, after all. Galilee is 90 miles away. Why should they have to walk 90 miles to meet Jesus when he could just pop in on them in whatever room they were hiding?

Maybe it was a slam on the religious establishment. For the last week of his life, Jesus duked it out with the religious leaders. He made a mess of their temple. He told embarrassing parables about them. He made them look stupid in a battle of wits. So what's with the attitude? Why was Jesus so combative? **Because eternity was at stake!** The religious establishment was killing the people of God. Crushing them under rules and legalities. Jesus had come to save the people from the very religion that was supposed to point them to God...and he was willing to fight to the death to do so!

So, maybe ignoring Jerusalem was Matthew's way of saying, "This old way is done. The way of the temple and of rules ...the way of working hard to earn God's favor...the way that has Jerusalem as the center of the spiritual universe...that is done. If you want to find your way to the Father, make your way to Jesus, wherever he is!"

There are so many who desperately need to understand this: The religion that demands that we work hard and do all the right things and be better than others because God grades on the curve... that way is done. It is dead. It doesn't work. It never did. You cannot earn God's love. You cannot be good enough to deserve God's love. God already loves you.

The longer you hunker down in Jerusalem...the longer you try to obey rules and be good and earn God's love...the longer you will miss out on meeting Jesus where he really is! If you are a "Used-to" Believer who has mostly given up because you can't be good enough, good news. **You're right!** But Jesus is good enough. Go to him! And if you are a religious snob who thinks God is lucky to have you...guess what? You're wrong! But Jesus loves you, too, and longs to break you free from your religious arrogance. So, maybe Jesus sent them to Galilee because he was done with Jerusalem.

Or maybe because Galilee is where they really knew Jesus. That is where he called them to leave their nets. That is where they sat on a mountain and listened to a sermon that would change the world. That is where they rocked in a boat while Jesus told a storm to "Shut up" ...and it did. That is where they saw him beat up on the demons and put new flesh on leprous bodies and give eyes to the blind.

It was in Galilee that the disciples saw Jesus most clearly. In Galilee that they were called and trained and empowered by Jesus. It was there that they learned to teach and they learned to heal and they learned to cast out evil spirits. **In Galilee... they were at their best.** But when they got to Jerusalem, everything went crazy. Lots of competing voices. Lots of confusion. Lots of fear. They weren't sure what they believed any more. Everything that was so clear to 90 miles north...now wasn't clear at all.

But Jesus remembered them at their best. He wanted to pull them out of the craziness of Jerusalem so that they could hear him again. And know him again. And trust and love him again. And more to the point... so that they could experience his love and purpose and pleasure in their lives again.

If you are a “Used-to” Believer this morning it might be **because** you are stuck in Jerusalem. The confusion, the hectic voices, the crazy demands upon your life—make it impossible for you to hear the voice that you once heard so clearly. To experience the power and love of Jesus in a way that once mattered to you. **Do you miss that?**Maybe you need to go back to Galilee.

Ask yourself this question: where was it that Jesus was most real to me? Was it when you were reading the Bible and praying every morning? Was it that small group of Christians with whom you met regularly? Was it a mission trip where you built houses for the poor or fed folks under a bridge? When you were an advisor to a youth group? Was it when you never missed a Sunday morning with your church family?

If there was a time when Jesus seemed real and important to you...but doesn't anymore...**maybe you are in the wrong city.** Maybe you need to go back to Galilee for a reunion. And maybe Jesus is saying, **“I’m here to be found...but you are going to have to put out some effort.** You are going to have to seek me. I have made it easy for you to be saved but I haven't made it so easy that you'll think this is a cheap gift. It isn't. It cost me my life. It will cost you something, too. So how about a little effort on your part? A little bit of a journey? Just take a few steps toward Galilee...and you'll find me waiting there for you!”

Here's the amazing thing about the Easter. Jesus' first words were not for the pagans or unbelievers. That would come later. Jesus' first resurrection words were, “I want you to Go to those who used to believe in me...but don't anymore because they are disheartened or the distracted. Tell them they are still precious to me. And however they might feel about me or about themselves right now, I love them and I want them back.”

I don't know how many of you this morning would say, “I used to believe...my faith used to seem so real...but something happened. Something slipped. I just slipped away.” Well, here's your great Easter news: **Right after God raised Jesus from death to life...you were the first thing on his mind.** And you still are.