

Lucia Lloyd's sermon
Easter Vigil
Matthew 28:1-10

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Tonight at our Easter Vigil we give thanks for the gifts we receive from outside ourselves. Tonight we give thanks for the gift we receive from God. One of the wonderful things about being at both Easter services is that we get to hear about the resurrection from two different perspectives, each with its own particular emphasis. The perspective we will hear from John tomorrow explores the reactions of various people to the resurrection, and explores the internal workings of their minds, hearts and souls going through different processes. Tonight we get Matthew's emphasis, and Matthew's emphasis is not on what human beings are doing or how human beings are responding; Matthew's emphasis is on the amazingness of God. Matthew's emphasis is on the extraordinary gifts God gives us. Matthew tells us that something earthshattering has happened here, literally earthshattering with a great earthquake, and an angel who looks like lightning.

The guards are so overcome with terror that they become like dead men. Then, as Cameron Murchison puts it, "Having dispensed with the guards through overwhelming fear, the angel speaks reassuringly to the women, 'Do not be afraid'." The blazing angel tells the women he knows they're looking for Jesus, tells them he is not here but has been raised, tells them to come see the place where he lay, tells them to convey this good news to the disciples, and that they will see him in Galilee. All of this is God's doing.

Murchison goes on, "Matthew's core theological point is that there is no merely naturalistic way of speaking of the resurrection. This is not about human capacities or possibilities. It is wholly about God's capacity and determination. If goodness and mercy are to withstand the onslaught of religiously based self-righteousness and control, it is not because good people just keep trying hard. If death as a final conclusion to even the most finely lived human life is to be transcended, it is not because such goodness just naturally lives on. It is, rather, because God acts at that boundary of life we call death and does something altogether new. Angels and earthquakes are the inevitable elements of the resurrection narrative, because

that is the only way Matthew can make clear that we are confronted with God's possibilities and not our own."

I don't know about you, but I've got good days and bad days, times when I overcome obstacles and times when I fall flat on my face, times when I try to follow Jesus and times when I get distracted by whatever shiny object happens to catch my attention. So I am deeply thankful that the cosmic forces of the universe are in better hands than mine. Much, much better hands than mine.

Tonight we see the culmination of the cosmic victory of light over darkness, freedom over slavery, life over death. Most important of all, we see the victory of God's love over everything that would want to limit or diminish it. God shows us in this resurrection that God's love breaks through all of that, even death itself. God is not limited by human sin or betrayal or torture or execution; instead God's love triumphs over all of that by forgiveness and grace. So that we will get the picture, God performs this astounding miracle.

Matthew does show us the response of the women, and it is a simple one: "So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples." When Jesus suddenly meets them and says hello, they take hold of his feet and worship him. Sometimes that is the best response of all to a gift from God that is amazingly wonderful: to give thanks, to adore, to worship this amazing God.