

Matthew 28:1-10
April 24, 2011, Easter Sunday

Hampton Baptist
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“The News that’s Fit to Print”

In the upper left corner of the print edition of the *New York Times*, you can find these words, “All the news that’s fit to print.” Many of you know that I have a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism, so because of my training, I am interested in news. Of all the news that is fit to print, what is the best news that you have heard recently? That the recent tornado did *not* hit Hampton? That this beautiful weather will last a few more days?

What is some good news that you would *like* to hear? That our church received a sizeable monetary gift to assist with renovation of our facility? That gas prices will begin to drop dramatically before Memorial Day? That the war in Afghanistan has ended? Certainly all of these would be welcomed *good* news.

A few years ago, Anne Murray had a best-selling hit, “Sure could use a little good news today.” We enjoy good news. Television, radio, and newspapers report primarily *bad* news. When you hear good news, you want to repeat it to somebody.

I had a friend, an elderly lady, who rarely left her house because of her health. But Frances Chapman always knew the local news. She was feeble in body, but she always knew the latest. The reason? Each time she finished a phone call, she would say, “Call me when you know something.” And she spent a lot of time on the phone with ladies her age. Daily, she would make the rounds, calling to find out what was happening.

The account of Easter is newsworthy; the message is *good* news. Of all the news that’s fit to print, this is the best news I know. And like Anne Murray, I sure could use a little good news today.

In our Gospel Lesson, Matthew set the stage after the Sabbath. Jesus had been crucified on Friday. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph were among the band of followers who journeyed with Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem.

They had cared for him and had helped Jesus with his needs along the way. They had seen his royal entrance into Jerusalem. When Jesus was arrested, his disciples fled; they abandoned him at his most critical hour. But not the women. They followed Jesus all the way to the cross. And they watched him die. They then saw Jesus’ body laid in a tomb hewn from a rock face. A stone was then rolled over the entrance of the tomb. These two ladies had seen it all. These events were newsworthy, yet the incidents were not *good* news.

Mary Magdalene was one of Jesus’ close friends. He had healed her from demon possession. When he died, she may have lost her best friend. This is the only time that Mary, the mother of James and Joseph, is mentioned in the Bible, so we don’t know much about her. But we do know that she was a mother. Other gospel writers record that Jesus’ mother was also present. So Mary, the mother of James and Joseph, saw Jesus die. As a mother, she was affected also.

Both Marys came to look at the tomb. Jesus had died around 3:00 on Friday afternoon. The Sabbath began at sundown on Friday. There was very little time between his burial and the beginning of the Sabbath. And because of the Sabbath

restrictions, they were forbidden from going to the tomb.

So they finally slipped out, when they could, just to see the tomb. Their short-term memory provided them with an ominous picture of the stone sealing the tomb signifying that it was the end of Jesus. They could no longer see him. The One who had given them new life and a reason to live had been killed and was living no longer. They had placed their hope and trust in this great Holy Man, the One they believed to be the Messiah, the Christ, the Promised One for Israel. Was their faith in vain? Had they followed someone who could not deliver? He had stated just a few days earlier that he was the resurrection and the life. And with that, he raised Lazarus from the dead. But now, Jesus himself was dead. His ministry was over; the light from his good life was snuffed out. And these two women wanted to go to the tomb, just to look.

For what were they looking? Today, what do people seek when they go to graveyards or cemeteries? Did they need reassurance? Did they wonder if someone had tampered with the tomb? Or did they have second thoughts? We don't know.

We do know that a violent earthquake shook the earth before they arrived at the tomb on Sunday morning. I am not surprised that an earthquake signaled the resurrection, because Easter is a supernatural event. There had also been an earthquake at the moment Jesus died on the cross. Cornelius Lapidé said, "The earth, which trembled with sorrow at the death of Christ, leaped for joy at his resurrection." (A. T. Robertson. Word Pictures of the New Testament, vol. 1. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books. 1930. p. 241) Jesus had figuratively shaken the city of Jerusalem with his entrance on Sunday; his resurrection had physically shaken Jerusalem a week later.

Matthew recorded that an angel rolled back the stone and sat thereon. The word *angel* literally means *messenger*, and this celestial body certainly had some good news to tell. The stone was moved for the two devotees, who shared the same name, to view the emptiness of the tomb; the stone was not moved for Jesus to get out. The power of the resurrection could not be thwarted by matter even as dense as rock. The tomb needed to be open for the world to see, and the world came first in the followers called Mary.

Matthew also recorded that after the death of Jesus, Pilate ordered that the tomb be guarded. Rolling a stone away from the tomb would have been a major accomplishment. The stone was circular and rolled downhill in a grooved track. Rolling the heavy rock uphill and then securing it would be difficult. Still, Pilate ordered guards to patrol the tomb. When they felt the earthquake and saw the angel, they forgot their governmental allegiance. Their duty had been eclipsed by the supernatural; fear gripped them and caused them to surrender their obligation. The tomb was now garrisoned by the new messenger.

And when the women arrived at the tomb, they received a different message from what they expected. The messenger gave them *good* news: "Don't be frightened like the guards who were supposed to watch the tomb. I realize that you are looking for the Christ, the crucified one. You saw him die; you even saw him placed in this tomb. And now you have come to look in the tomb. Go ahead and look. The good news is that he is not there. Your memory is not slipping. You *did* see him placed in

this tomb. You *did* see this large rock wheel rolled in front of the opening. The good news is that He has risen.”

Upon telling them the good news, the messenger instructed them *not* to keep this news to themselves. “Go quickly,” he told them. This is urgent. Whom should they tell? Start by telling the disciples, those who had deserted him at the cross. They had also followed him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They had ridden the popularity wave as long as they could. Yet when Jesus was arrested, they vanished. They ran for their lives . . . literally. If Jesus was arrested, then they could be next. If he died, then they would also be executed. But now, the messenger was instructing these women to tell the good news to these deserters; this good news was that important.

Sometime ago, a Mercedes Benz television commercial showed their car colliding with a cement wall during a safety test. Someone asked a company spokesperson why they did not enforce their patent on the Mercedes Benz’s energy-absorbing car body, a design evidently copied by other companies because of its success. He replied, “Because some things in life are too important not to share.” The good news of Jesus’ resurrection was too important *not* to share; the women hurriedly left the tomb to share the good news.

This was not only good news for the women who followed Jesus all the way to the cross. This was good news even for the ones who abandoned Jesus.

And not surprisingly, the women, who had risked their very lives with their devotion to the crucified Jesus, did as was commanded. They followed the directive of the messenger. They were fueled by fear but filled with joy. They ran. This news was so urgent, so pressing, so compelling that they hurriedly went to find the disciples.

And then, while on their journey to find the disciples, the unthinkable happened. They were actually greeted by Jesus! Can you imagine how they felt? They had experienced an emotional high on the previous Sunday. The events of the week had left them emotionally exhausted. They had endured a black Sabbath, and because they could not rest, they went to the tomb. The messenger encouraged them to spread the news even to the disciples, that the One who had embraced the sinner, the prostitute, the drunk, and the outcast was offering acceptance to those who had rejected him. With joyful shock, they had fled to find the disciples and then met Jesus on the road. Their dashed hopes had found a safe harbor. Upon seeing him, they were moved to worship. He was everything that he said he was.

Sometimes we are afraid to believe good news. We have been told that if it sounds too good to be true, then it probably is. But the good news of Jesus resurrection is believable, even though it may seem too good to be true.

Jesus encouraged the Marys not to be afraid. He called his disciples “brothers” signifying his continued acceptance of them despite their desertion. The message needed to be told. The women were to spread the good news.

So today, what is the news that’s fit to print? The good news is that we don’t have to be afraid; a continual theme in our passage is to calm the women. In Jesus, there is no need to fear anything. God’s power is greater than any evil force.

What’s the news that’s fit to print? The good news is that Jesus still offers

unconditional acceptance; this grace is available not just to whom we consider to be known sinners such as the murderers, the addicts, the thieves. Jesus continues to accept us, the “believers” who may still reject him when the going gets tough.

What’s the news that’s fit to print? The good news is that the risen Christ first appeared to women, which is significant given the inferior role of females in first century Palestine. Jesus continues to love every individual equally, no matter their gender, their race, their nationality, nor their status. What’s the news that’s fit to print? The good news is that there’s hope even when your world seems darkest. For the two Marys, their despair had reached an all-time low. No matter how bad you feel, despite your circumstance, regardless of your plight, there is hope knowing that God is more powerful than any other evil you face.

What’s the news that’s fit to print? The best news I know is that Jesus Christ still lives, still loves, and still cares about us just as much today as the faithful women and the faithless, fearful, fleeing disciples. The good news is that Christ the Lord is risen today. So let’s spread the good news. It’s just too important not to share. He lives! He lives! Christ Jesus lives today! AMEN.