

“Go to Galilee”
Easter Sermon by Oby Ballinger
Edina Morningside and Linden Hills UCC; April 9, 2023

Matthew 28:1-10

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message for you.” So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

Reading this year through Matthew’s description of Jesus’ last week, I noticed for the first time how many references there are to earthquakes. As Jesus parades into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, we hear that “the whole city was in turmoil”. “Turmoil” is the Greek word *seio* and [means](#) to “shake, move, or quake”. It’s the root word for “seismic”—Jerusalem was quaking at the approach of Jesus. The week holds more tremors too. At the moment when Jesus dies on the cross, Matthew says, “the earth shook, and the rocks were split.” Now today, as Mary Magdalene and the other Mary approach the tomb of Christ, there is a “great earthquake”, another *seismos*. And finally, the guards “shook and became like dead men” in the presence of God’s angel—*seio* again.

Such earthshaking developments of the last week! It calls to mind devastating earthquakes like the February one in Turkey and Syria, which makes me wonder if this many earthquakes in one week is a good thing. Such life-changing cataclysms hold as much dread and foreboding as the possibility of joy. I get that we’re talking about resurrection here, but does Easter always need to be so...dramatic? I’m sympathetic to another pastor, who [asks](#): “Why can’t the celebration be more ‘dinner party’ than ‘shock and awe’?”

God doesn’t *always* show up with supernatural power, after all. Recall Elijah the prophet, who was promised he would see God, so he left his mountain hideout to keep watch. First he experiences a great windstorm, but God was not in the wind. “And after the wind an earthquake, but [God] was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but [God] was not in the fire.” (1 Kings 19:11-12) Remember where God was actually found? In a sound of sheer silence.

Perhaps its significant then that here at the tomb, Jesus is not found in the earthquake. The angel of God proclaims that he has been risen, but the women cannot see him. The earthquake only reveals the empty place where Jesus’ body once lay. The angel tells them where they will truly find Jesus: “he is going ahead of you to Galilee”. Only when they’re on their way to the disciples does Jesus meet the women, greet them, and repeat the exhortation to go to Galilee.

Galilee is the place where it all began: where Jesus was baptized, where he proclaimed the Good News, where he called and taught his disciples, where he proclaimed the message, and where he liberated people from sickness and demons. While the crucifixion and resurrection happen in Jerusalem, Galilee is “the place from which the disciples and the women came: their home turf, the place of their daily routine.”¹ Jesus may be gone from the tomb, but he’s left a forwarding address: Galilee.

¹ Lamar Williamson, Jr. *Mark*, in the *Interpretation Bible commentary series* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983), 285.

Where is your Galilee—a spiritual or physical homeland? Galilee is the everyday place or state of heart that you find yourself in. It might be where you live or where you work. Maybe it's with people who mean the world to you and are far away, or it's when you are all by yourself. Galilee is wherever you're going next after church, where you will be this week, where you spend much of your time. And it is *there* that Jesus has gone before, promising to meet us there.

The poet Sophia Stid says of resurrection, "We hear so much about the healing, but I want to know about after the miracle, when everyone else has gone home." She [describes](#) the everydayness by which women folded the blankets, prepared food, massaged flesh, cleaned dishes, and wove cloth. On this Easter of infinite possibilities, Stid reminds us that new creation comes from longtime practices. And after Easter, the common people who experienced astonishing victory over death will return to their same daily and essential tasks, infused with joy. Stid writes: "Behind every resurrection: dailiness."

Easter joy more often exists not in a one-time spectacle, but in our steady commitment to love self, neighbor, stranger, and creation, as often as possible in a thousand everyday ways back in the Galilees of our lives. On Easter and every day, resurrection arrives again as you show tender compassion for your body in all its perfect imperfections. Soak in what goodness there is to find from animals, plants, and time outdoors. Greet strangers, share meals, risk forgiveness, express thanks, give freely, release regret, and cherish stillness. A day hemmed in by these practices is less likely to unravel. They are instead seeds of resurrection that blossom into new life for the world. Our everyday lives, at moments spectacular but mostly mundane, will be the cloth that cradles divinity, where resurrection is found on earth as in heaven.

Resurrection doesn't require earthquakes, even if they were there on the first Easter. When we leave the church today, and return to what might be considered "ordinary life", that's the Galilee of everydayness where Christ will be with us. Christ has already gone ahead, and promises to meet us there!

So be with us, Jesus into the rest of our lives. Be with us in our homes and families, such as they are—broken and mended, fighting and blended. Be with us in our places of work and leisure, transforming them from mindless activities into spaces to show holy love. Be with us in our classrooms and doctor's offices and job interviews, accompanying us in the hope of what's possible, and in the times of defeat as well. Be with us in our public life, in the bitterest headlines, healing the divides with a greater call to servanthood and humility.

Yes, Jesus goes with us from the tomb and into Galilee. He will mend what continues to need mending in our Galilee places. He transforms the rocky roads we travel into paths where we see Christ in one another. Christ is risen; Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!