

April 20, 2014 “What It’s All About” Matthew 27:62-28:10

For the past 11 weeks I have been working a series. The point of the series was that flowing forward from the stories of the birth of Jesus, through the scant references to His childhood to the first moments of His public ministry and on through the details of that 3 year work, a consistent thread is Jesus self awareness reflected in the teaching He did with the disciples, that He had come to save people, including us, from our sins. And part of that self awareness on the part of Jesus is that He could do this work because He is the Son of God, the fulfillment of the prophecies of a Messiah, the Saviour.

You have heard me say as a recurrent refrain that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John did not set out to write definitive biographies of Jesus. The Gospels do not set out to tell us everything we ever wanted to know about Jesus life. They are different documents representing different points of view. Critics have pointed out what they believe to be inconsistencies in the accounts. That’s because the critics of the Gospels and the Christian faith, think they are attempts to write biographies! They are not. Each of the 4 Gospels sets out to tell us the story of the cross and the story of the resurrection as the exclamation point that He is God’s Son, He died for us and the prime sign that He can give us eternal life is in the fact

that He is alive. He is risen. The grave could not hold Him. Death has been defeated.

Now it is interesting to notice on the way by, that for Matthew that includes sharing the story of Jesus birth including the story of those Gentiles, the wise men. And they brought gifts. Frankincense which was used as incense to symbolize the presence of God Almighty. Gold. Because Jesus is born to be King of Kings. And myrrh used in the burial of the dead, because Jesus was born to die for us. Mark was a teenager. Like most teens he is focused on now. Now for Mark was the time between the beginning of Jesus teaching, preaching, healing ministry leading Jesus step by step to Calvary. Luke tells us the most detailed story about Jesus because Luke understood the importance of accuracy and research to that end. His is the most careful account of the life of the One who can alone redeem us. And John makes the point over and over again, that Jesus is God among us in flesh and blood. Born like we were born. And in the end dying that we might live, eternal life.

And the four of them, the Gospel writers, tell us their memories of how the resurrection of Jesus was made known to them. It is a crucial element in the history of God's saving sinners because for each of them it is the fact of the risen Christ, that took them beyond the realm of ideas and

understanding to a rich personal faith that coloured everything they did in the balance of their lives.

As part of the story Matthew tells us that accusers of Jesus were careful about that tomb in which Jesus was buried. Get this because it is significant. There is not a single statement from the accusers of Christ, or from Roman records that questions the fact that Jesus died on the cross. There was no question as to whether or not Jesus was placed in the tomb. Being dead He was buried! There was concern from the very first that Jesus stay that way. The chief priests and the Pharisees in particular understood that Jesus had said He would rise from the dead the 3<sup>rd</sup> day. The disciples did not believe it would happen. The Pharisees were certain it couldn't happen. But they wanted the tomb guarded and sealed so there could be no fooling around with the evidence that Jesus was dead.

As I read to you, Matthew tells us that Pontius Pilate in this matter was accommodating. He gave them a force. And He gave instruction that they should do everything they could to make that tomb as secure as they could make it. It is also important to note that no one claimed the disciples overpowered the guards, and took the body by force. Jesus body is in the tomb. The tomb is sealed with the carved, stone door, and the Roman seal is placed on it, which makes it a capital offence against the Emperor for someone to break that

seal. The disciples have scattered. Fearful that they might be next to be arrested and suffer and die, they stay behind locked doors.

Matthew says the story of the cross begins with an angel of God, a heaven sent messenger of God Almighty telling Joseph to take Mary to be his wife. That she is indeed pregnant, and that that pregnancy is from the Holy Spirit of God. And so now as we move into the final chapter of the story of Jesus time on earth, a powerful earthquake has burst upon the scene. An angel of God is seen to roll the stone away breaking the seal, and then the angel sits on the stone. The angel is radiant. The guards are terrified. They are not about to try and arrest, question, detain or in any way mess with this figure who is in appearance like lightning. He is dazzling to look at. That means they do not see the colour of the angel's eyes, they do not see the shape of the angel's nose. It blinds them to look at him. And that adds to their terror. They have seen many things as soldiers. They have never seen anything like this.

Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus have gone to the tomb. As Matthew tells the story one gets the impression they saw some of this or perhaps just the results. The terrified guards. The openness of the empty tomb. The presence of the angel. And it all amounts to a message that

God is on the scene. And that now we must deal with and come to grips with and indeed recognize, the rest of the story.

This is Matthew's memory of what he was told. The prominence of Mary, the mother of Jesus in the new movement we come to call the Church, that the people at the time call "the way" and that the Gospel writers refer to as "believers", Mary is probably one of the chief sources of the details we have concerning the resurrection. She along with Mary Magdalene. But you have to recognize that in that society and at that time, the words of a woman were not taken very seriously. So what alters that? Clearly, the presence of angels, the obvious detail that God is involved makes the word of women...what shall I say....how about gospel?

Matthew tells us, the angel was quick to minister to the women who went to the tomb. Don't be afraid. There is a lot of "afraid" going around. Peter and John, no doubt the balance of the disciples, the twelve. Do not be afraid. It is not a plea. It is a command. It is a declaration that they are in the presence of one who is friend as opposed to foe. A representative of the living God.

The angel said, "You are here looking for Jesus, who was crucified." I am as certain as anyone could be about anything when I tell you what those words mean is...You are looking for Jesus who was dead. Crucifixion was a means of

capital punishment. In the archives of Roman history there is not one story of anyone surviving crucifixion. It was a death sentence. A cruel death sentence. It was meant to make capital punishment a spectacle. It is the greatest deterrent to crime the Roman Empire offers. No one survived crucifixion. If Jesus had escaped, you would find a reference in the Roman history. Some one would have died for letting it happen. Jesus was dead.

But the angel explains..."He is not here in this tomb in this graveyard. He has risen. Just as He said he would do. Remember Matthew chapter 20 verse 17-19...Jesus is speaking. It's a little over a week earlier. "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> day he will be raised to life."

And this is where you come in. This is where you and all the people like you come in. This is where being Christian, a follower of Jesus comes in. What the Gospel tells us is how to be alive...eternally alive. What this Christian thing is all about is that Jesus is alive. He has saved us from our sinfulness, by dying....really dying....and rising the 3<sup>rd</sup> day as He said He would do. So...be not afraid to live for God and among other people.

Live in the sure knowledge which faith in Jesus alone grasps. He is alive. He is with you. May your joy be full and overflowing.

Let us pray;

Thank you Lord for that which you did and that which you do. For making these things important to us, for opening the eyes of our faith, which goes beyond understanding, we praise your name. For loving us enough to be our redeemer we want to worship you and serve you. Lead us and guide us that we might be followers and servants of Jesus in all we do. Amen