

WHAT DID THAT ANGEL SAY?
(Sermon for Burnaby Taiwanese Presbyterian Church,
Easter Sunday, April 5, 2015)

1 Cor. 15:3-11

Text: Matthew 28:1-10

Glen Davis

Just a few days before Easter, a little girl was sitting with her family. They were watching a movie about the life of Jesus on T.V. When it came to the part where Jesus was beaten and carried his cross to Calvary and nailed to that cross, the little girl was very sad and tears rolled down her cheeks. Then she watched very quietly as they took the body of Jesus down from the cross and laid it in a tomb. Then the little girl jumped up and sat on her daddy's knee. There was a big smile on her face and she said, "Now comes the GOOD part!"

Well today is the good part.

Please imagine this scene.

It is just past sunrise and a group of men are in a large room. Some are sitting up on their blankets yawning and stretching. The air smells of all-night breath. One man throws open the shutters to let in some fresh air. Two others are talking quietly in a corner. One has already gone out to buy some bread for breakfast. Several others are still snoring.

The men are sad, and full of grief and fear.

Suddenly there is a loud knock on the door. Quickly everyone is up and on guard. Their hiding place has been discovered. What do they do now?

But the voices outside are not the deep voices of the temple police. They are women's voices – familiar voices – the voices of the two Mary's: Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Jesus.

One of the men lets them in. The two women rush in; they are half laughing and half crying. They are both trying to speak at once.

Andrew says: "Whoa! Hold on a minute and catch your breath. Now, tell us what is going on."

Mary Magdalene begins: "He's alive! Praise God, he's alive!"

Peter jumps up and looks right into her eyes. “Alive?” he says. “What do you mean ‘alive’? He is as dead as a stone. We saw them put him in the tomb.”

Jesus’ mother speaks. “Peter! All of you! Listen. We saw an angel and he told us to come and give you a message.”

“Message? What message?” asks Andrew.

The other Mary begins to tell the story. “We got up before dawn to go see the tomb. As we approached, the earth began to shake, like an earthquake, and an angel came down and rolled away the stone and sat on it. We were terrified. Then the angel spoke.

“What did he say?” asks James.

“I’m getting to that” says Mary, “but I want you to hear the whole story.”

Peter interrupts, “But what did he SAY?”

“Yes” says John. “The message. What was the message?”

Can you imagine it? Jesus was a dear friend of these disciples. If he is alive and left a message for them, they want to hear it. The message is the most important thing.

When we read this story earlier, did you hear what the angel said? He said, “This is my message for you.” This was the FIRST Easter message. It was given to two women, both named Mary. These were two women who loved Jesus deeply. It is very appropriate that Jesus had a message for them on Easter morning.

We often forget that Jesus also has a message for us on Easter Sunday. Listen to his message to the two women, and listen for his message to you.

The first thing the angel said to them was, “Don’t be afraid!” But how could they not be afraid? It’s half dark. They are in a cemetery. The earth is shaking. There is a strange figure in front of them with a face like lightning. Of course they are afraid. So they needed this message, “Don’t be afraid.”

Friends, do you need to hear these words today? What fear have you brought with you to church today? Under your cheerful mask, what fear have you brought? We all have our secret fears. Maybe it's the fear of growing old alone with no one to care for us. Or the fear of being a burden to our family. Or a fear of rapid technology change that we can never understand. Or the fear that our children or grandchildren will not find the right way. Or the fear of cancer. Or the fear of losing our job. Or some other fear? What are you afraid of this Easter day?

Whatever fear you have, this Easter message is for you and for me: "Don't be afraid." But we might ask: "Why should I not fear? What is the reason?"

The angel gives the best reason. He says, "I know you. I know your fear. I know your sorrow. I know why you are here. You are looking for Jesus who was crucified."

Friends, what about you? Have you come here this Easter day looking for Jesus? Have you come with your fears and worries? Or with your dissatisfaction at the shallow attractions of this world? Or with your stress and tiredness? Or with your doubt and confusion about the Christian faith? Or with your questions about the meaning of your life? Have you come to church on Easter Sunday looking for Jesus?

Please listen. God knows you. He knows why you have come. He knows your fears and doubts and worries. He knows your hopes and joys and disappointments. He knows your faith and your lack of faith. God knows why you are here, so **DO NOT BE AFRAID.**

That was the first part of the message to the two women..

But the next part of the message was startling and disappointing. The angel says: "He is not here."

The women cannot believe it. They must have said: "But how? What do you mean? He must be here. We watched him die. We saw them put him into this tomb."

The angel continues, (and this is the **GOOD** part.): "He has been raised, as he said." In other words, "The Jesus you are looking for; the crucified, dead Jesus is not here. He has been raised, as he said. And this is the key part of that first Easter message. "He has been raised, as he said."

This sentence told the women two vital facts.

First, “He has been raised.” It was not “He raised himself.” This is not something Jesus did by himself. It is something that was done by someone else. It is an act of God. It is something that only God could do. God is at work here.

The other important fact is in the words, “as he said”. That is, Jesus told them that this would happen. Three times he told them: “I will suffer and die, but I will be raised up on the third day.” Perhaps they missed that part of the message, so the angel reminds them. “He has been raised **as he said**.”

Those women came to the tomb looking for the dead Jesus. They expected to see the corpse of Jesus. But if that is what they expected, they had come to the wrong place.

And if you have come to church today looking for a corpse, you are in the wrong place. And if you have had some rough times lately and have lost your hope; and if you don't expect to find anything in this church but a tired old message from a tired old preacher, then you have come to the wrong place.

If your faith has grown weak; if you are too sophisticated for the simple, old fashioned good news; and if you expect that no one really believes in the risen Christ anymore, then you are in the wrong place.

The message God has for you here today is not one of sorrow or bitterness or doubt. The message God has for you today is one of joy and hope. It is this message: “He has been raised, as he said.”

What are the angel's next words? They are an invitation. “Come and see the place where he lay.” Oh yes, he WAS here. Come and see. But he's not here anymore. Come and see. The tomb is empty; come and see.”

But after the invitation, what comes next? It is a command. “Go quickly and tell his disciples. Those fearful, guilty, cowardly disciples – they need to hear this good news. Go and tell them. Tell them that Jesus has been raised from the dead.”

“And one more thing. Tell them that he is going before them into Galilee.”

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Did you know that Jesus needs the church? Jesus needs the church to go and tell. Just as he needed those two women to go and tell, he needs us to go and tell. He needed the disciples to go and tell. Because they went and told the Easter message,

you and I are here today. We have heard the Easter message because somebody told us. And if we don't go and tell, the message of forgiveness will never reach deeply into the hearts of broken, hopeless people. If we don't go and tell, the message of love will never reach into the lives of those who live by hatred and revenge. Jesus needs the church.

But also, the church needs Jesus. Jesus told the women that he was going before them into Galilee. The disciples needed Jesus to go ahead of them. And we need Jesus to go ahead of us. We cannot do this work by ourselves. We need the help and the guidance of Jesus.

So the women ran and told the disciples the message. And here we are, 2000 years later, hearing the same message. This Easter message is for us.

- 1) First, don't be afraid, whatever your fears.
- 2) Second, I know you, and I know you are looking for Jesus.
- 3) He has been raised by the power of God. He has defeated death and he gives us new life.
- 4) Come and see; go and tell,
- 5) And he goes before us.

That is the message.

Is it too good to be true? Did those women just dream up that message? Perhaps you choose to believe that they just made it all up. That is your privilege. But I choose to believe that the women told the truth. I choose to believe that the promises of Easter are the solid foundation for a whole new way of living.

Maybe I'm wrong. If I'm wrong, I have not lost anything. But if I'm right, and you're wrong, then you have lost everything. I can't prove the resurrection to you. No one can. The resurrection is not a scientific theory to be proved. It is a mystery to be accepted, and trusted.

And if you accept it and believe it with all your heart, your worst fears will melt away. You too, just like those two Mary's, will go forward in hope and joy. You will know that Jesus goes before you, and one day you too will see him.

THE LORD IS RISEN!

