

The Easter Story

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[0 : 00] I'll be with you here celebrating this Easter morning. And we're going to look today at the Easter story, which I imagine is familiar for many of us here. We're reading it from Matthew this year, from Matthew 28.

! So we'll read 1 through 10 and then 16 through 20. It's on the screen. Excellent. So you follow along with me as you will. After the Sabbath at dawn, on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and going to the tomb rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning and his clothes were white as snow.

The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who is crucified.

He's not here. He has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples. He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee.

[1 : 12] There you will see him. Now I have told you. So the woman hurried away from the tomb, afraid, yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

Suddenly, Jesus met them. Greetings, he said. They came to him, clasped his feet, and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, Do not be afraid.

Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee. There they will see me. Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.

When they saw him, they worshipped him. But some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have said, or ever commanded you.

[2 : 11] And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Would you please lift up your hearts in prayer with me this morning?

Father, Son, Holy Spirit, we come to you this morning, on this beautiful sunny morning, to be reminded of the Easter story, of the resurrection of your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself, who humbled himself for us, so that we could be redeemed.

You are faithful, God. And we come to you this morning in response to that faithfulness, to the ways that you've cared for us, that you've loved us, that you've redeemed us all throughout our lives.

We thank you for that. We pray as we enter into the space, Holy Spirit, that you are at work in our hearts, that you work in our minds, to hear and to receive the words you had for us this morning, from your word.

Lord, we pray that as we listen to these words, Lord, I pray specifically that your word would shine forth, that you would use my words for encouragement, or maybe even for challenge, but that we would continue to be your people, that you would strengthen us today, so that we can go forth from this place, by your power, Lord, the power of your Holy Spirit, and in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

[3 : 50] Amen. I wonder, what's the story that you tell about yourself? We're all storytelling people, right?

Naturally, we as people tell stories, and when you're in conversations with others, and you're at parties, when you meet people for the first time, you tell stories about yourself.

I imagine those of us, those of you who are married, you have stories of first met that you like to tell, or stories about, you know, things as you were dating, what happened in your life that really made

you fall in love with this person, or we tell stories of maybe the life that we have, how we ended up here in Appleton, and the journeys we had to the work that we have.

Maybe we ended up in this church at Covenant CRC. We also tell stories to make sense of all the difficult things that happened in our lives, times where maybe we were going through an intense period of pain and suffering.

And when we don't have a story that makes sense for what's going on in our life, it can be a real challenge. It can really be discouraging and could put us in despair.

[5 : 12] We turn to God and we say, God, why would you allow these things to happen to us? Because the stories we tell ourselves are really powerful. They say a lot about us and they can really help work in us and shape us to the people that God calls us to be.

The stories we tell ourselves, they can help us be more, they can make us more prideful and conceited, like we're just the best person in the world. Or they can make us feel shameful and have self-loathing that we're the worst people in the world.

Or we can have appropriately healthy stories that help us be grounded in the reality of who we are and who God created us to be.

And so today, on this Easter Sunday, I want us to reflect on how our stories, how our stories are grounded. What are they grounded in?

Are they grounded in something we do? Or are they grounded in this ultimate story that we read about here in Matthew? The ultimate story of what God has been doing all throughout the history of time that we see from the very beginning of Scripture.

[6 : 28] Right? We see that at the very beginning, God creates the world. He creates these creatures, animals, birds, water, plant life, all these things that he says are good.

And then he creates humans, which are very good. But things take a turn and sin and evil enters into the world through the mistakes of those first people.

And the story seems to change. But as we continue on, we see that God is faithful all throughout the history, all throughout the biblical story, that he has a plan, that he will remain faithful to those that he calls and he will redeem them.

He calls those, he sets those apart in his covenant. People like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, the Israelites he calls out of Egypt and their kings, David, and the prophets.

And we see this story reaching its climax in our Savior, Jesus Christ, who's born, he becomes this humble little baby, humbles himself to be just like us, so that he can live that perfect life, that he can come and he can redeem all of creation.

[7 : 50] And we see that in its climax this weekend, through his death on the cross, and now in his beautiful, glorious resurrection here on Easter Sunday morning. You see, the resurrection, this climax of the story that God has been telling all throughout history reaches its climax here.

And it changes everything. It changes everything. And it transforms how we can see ourselves, how we are entered into that story, that Christ, that God has been working at through all these thousands thousands and thousands of years from the beginning of time.

Jesus is the fulfillment of that story. He's the fulfillment of that story, and what he does changes everything. And what I love about Matthew here, in this book specifically, is that Matthew is so concerned about wanting his readers to know that this story, Jesus is the fulfillment of it.

Matthew points out all the ways in which Jesus fulfills the Old Testament promises that Jesus is the ultimate culmination of God's faithfulness and love for his people.

That's why we see things like, you know, Matthew, where Jesus is, you know, goes off into Egypt. He has to escape this evil prisoner just like the Israelites went into Egypt and then were brought back, where Matthew highlights Jesus giving his, you know, Sermon on the Mount as a very similar story to Moses, giving the people the law at Mount Sinai.

[9 : 34] We see that Matthew is drawing us more and more into seeing that story of what God has been doing because he wants to highlight the faithfulness of God, that God's plan never changed.

He always knew what he was going to do. He was going to set free and redeem his people because when God calls his covenant people, when God calls us to follow him, no matter what happens, he remains faithful to us.

God remains faithful to who he calls. So because of that work of Jesus, what he has done on the cross and in his resurrection, we can see God's, the fullness of God's redemption and faithfulness on display.

And because of that, we're invited into that story. Because of that ultimate story that God has been at work, we are called to reflect on that. How are our lives, how do we enter into that story as well? And we see that. We see that in the gospel story here in Matthew in light of his disciples. Right? What we have here is Peter and the other disciples, but specifically Peter I want to focus on.

[10:56] All throughout this, you know, passion narrative, we start, when we start earlier on in the Garden of Gethsemane, we see Peter as this super zealous follower of Jesus.

He's got his sword swinging and he is going to like, you know, chop off any ear of someone who wants to come take Jesus away. I know obviously that's not what he should be doing, but Peter is this, this example of this disciple who is so important to the story.

He's this, this one that is probably the leader of the 12 in a lot of ways and he is zealous for Jesus. He's, you know, going out, stepping outside of boats on water because he loves and trusts Jesus. But today, at the empty tomb, Peter's nowhere to be found. Well, you see, when Jesus was taken away, Peter abandons Jesus.

He denies Jesus. He says, I didn't know Jesus three times to people just like Jesus said he would. And so what we have with Peter is this story seemingly of failure, right?

[12:10] This disciple who was so important and, you know, believed in Jesus so strongly, here, at the most important part of the story is nowhere to be found. Peter's not around.

And so, maybe Peter is having that sense of self-loathing that he's crafted this story over the past couple of days where he's like, okay, maybe that wasn't what it was.

Maybe I was a fool to believe in this man in the first place. But that's not the end of Peter's story because of what Christ does for Peter.

Because Christ, through his death and resurrection, brings about the fullness of redemption, we see that this story of failure is redeemed to a story of glory and honor and the power of redemption.

We see in John that Peter is redeemed by Jesus, that Jesus asks him, do you love me? Three times to take away what he had done denying Jesus.

[13:19] And because of that, God is going to use Peter to help, to be the rock in which the church is established. accomplished. This guy who, you know, was a little bit brash, a little bit bold too much, completely abandoned Jesus in the most important situation, Christ can redeem that story.

But Jesus, his death and resurrection highlights more than redemption. It also highlights the way in which Jesus is faithful, that he is the fullness of that example of God's faithfulness to his people.

And we see that faithfulness highlighted as well in another one of his disciples. And yeah, she's a disciple too, Mary Magdalene. You know, when we think about Jesus' disciples, we often think about in terms of the twelve disciples.

And that's true, you know, the twelve disciples are named. But when we read all the Gospels, we see that there's kind of like rings of followers of Jesus. You have the twelve, and actually within even the twelve, there's kind of the three, Peter, James, and John, who are kind of the most important.

But then outside of that, you have these other disciples, these other followers of Jesus as well. And this includes Mary Magdalene, the other Mary, Mary and Martha, and their brother Lazarus.

[14:43] These are these followers of Jesus that can rightfully call disciples, maybe with a small d, instead of the big d, where that Peter's a part of. But Jesus, these women, Mary Magdalene, the other Mary, they're not, they don't seem as important to the story.

When we see through, when we look at the Gospels, we see their ministry as more in the background. These are women that the Gospel tells us that are the ones financing, they're really doing a lot to help pay for Jesus' ministry.

They're doing the logistical work. They are probably like organizing meals, maybe organizing a place for Jesus and the disciples to stay at different times. They're doing that background work. But what Matthew highlights for us is their faithfulness to their Savior Jesus. That when the other disciples are nowhere to be found, Mary Magdalene, the other Mary, some of these other women, they're at his crucifixion.

They're there to help bury Jesus. And here they are on Sunday morning. The Sabbath is over. Time to get back to work. Doing that logistical prep that they always did.

[15:59] Caring for their Savior Jesus. This faithfulness. And in that sense, God honors that faithfulness because their faithfulness points to the faithfulness of God.

That is because that they have been faithful and they understand that their God is faithful and they continue to be faithful to him. That they are the first ones to witness and to proclaim the resurrection of their Savior who has been faithful to them.

Mary Magdalene, the other Mary, they enter into the story of Christ because of God's faithfulness. And so how do we enter the story?

How do we enter the story? What is the story we tell ourselves? How God has been at work in our lives? You know, we see these two examples here in this passage of kind of the extremes.

Right? On one hand, you have Peter who needs a lot of redemption because he completely abandons God. And on the other side, we have Mary Magdalene, the other Mary, these women who are so, that are faithful and devoted to their Savior.

[17:14] That points us to God's faithfulness. And so, for many of us, I imagine we probably fall somewhere in the middle. You know, we've maybe had times in our lives where we have abandoned God, where we have turned away, where we've like, you know, abandoned church, didn't want anything to do with Christianity.

Or we've done a lot of sinful things. We've struggled. We've wondered where is God in all this? And we need God to redeem our stories.

God, I don't understand what you did with that past 10 years where I'm struggling with sin, where I'm struggling with doubt, where I'm struggling with depression. God, how does this fit into your greater story?

I need this to be redeemed. Or on the other hand, when there are times in life where we have been remaining faithful, we've been faithful, we serve in the ways that God calls us to serve.

We continue. We come to church every week. We faithfully serve those in our community. We raise our children, which can be a pretty thankless task. And now maybe we're helping out with our grandchildren.

[18:24] Or we're praying for those in our family who maybe are going through difficult times. We're serving on committees. We're volunteering. And we think, well, this is all pretty small potatoes.

All this stuff is not that big of a deal. How is God going to use this? I'm not doing anything grand and big. I'm just showing up faithfully day after day. You see, all of our stories, all of our stories are important to God.

And God is at work in all of our lives. He is the one who is the author of our stories in the way that he is the author of all of creation. That he is at work in all of creation bringing his people closer and closer to him, redeeming them through his faithfulness.

And what I think is important to remember is when we look, especially at the example of Mary Magdalene, it's easy to say that, oh, because of her faithfulness she was rewarded.

Maybe sometimes we tell ourselves that, well, as long as I remain faithful, God will have, like, good things will happen to me. And for those of us who've lived long enough, we know that's not necessarily true.

[19:48] But it's because our faithfulness is not something that we do in order to achieve anything, right? We have been redeemed. We have been set free by God because God is faithful.

Not in order for him to do something. We don't, are we not faithful in order for him to redeem us? No. God is faithful to us and he redeems us.

He is faithful to us because he is faithful to those that he calls. We don't need to go and try to do more to solve anything, to earn anything.

No. We can rest. We can rest in God's faithfulness that he is the one at work and we see that in the work of his son through his death and resurrection.

That God has been ultimately faithful. And the lives of faithful people in our life point us more and more to that faithfulness. Think about, I actually, I want us to have a little, I have a little exercise for us.

[20:55] It might be a little awkward. No, I'm not going to ask you to talk to other people. But it's going to be a little awkward. There's something, I want, so I work as a children's, at the children's hospital as a chaplain and kind of one of the people in my, that I like to think about when I work with kids is Mr. Rogers, right?

From Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood. And one of the things that Mr. Rogers would often do, especially when he spoke with adults, is he would have everyone pause for one minute of silence and think about the people in their life that loved them, right?

