

“Resurrection Stories”

Matthew 28: 1-10

Now after the Sabbath,

toward the dawn of the first day of the week,

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.

And behold, there was a great earthquake;

for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven,

came and rolled back the stone, and sat upon it.

His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.

And for fear of him

the guards trembled and became like dead men.

But the angel said to the women, "You need not be afraid;

for 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

that he has risen from the dead.

And behold, he is going before you to Galilee;

there you will see him. For, I have told you so."

So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear

and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

And behold, there coming to meet them was Jesus,

and he said, Greetings!"

And they came up and took hold of his feet

and worshipped him.

Then Jesus said to them,

"Do not be afraid; go and tell my sisters and brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."

Resurrection Stories

Matthew 28:1-10

John 20:1-18

April 5, 2026

Rev. Michael P. Catanzaro

I.

Well, it's Easter my sisters and my brothers! Or, as it is more formally understood, the Feast of the Resurrection of Christ. The oldest and greatest feast of the Christian Church. Easter is the day we commemorate the raising of Christ from the dead three days after his crucifixion. Easter is the celebration of Christ's victory over sin and death, and this victory is the very core, the fundamental basis, of our hope as Christians. It is this hope for new life in Christ, won through his death on the cross, which makes our faith unique among the plethora of the world's religions. Given this, today I thought we would do well to take a hard and careful look at this resurrection story of ours.

II.

The Christian celebration of Easter is rooted in the Jewish Celebration of Passover and the feast of unleavened bread which go back to the time of bondage in Egypt. Remember, the purpose of Jesus going to Jerusalem, on what we now call Palm Sunday, was to partake in the feast of unleavened bread (remember the Hebrews had to flee Pharaoh before the bread could rise...) and this meal becomes what we know as the Last Supper. The celebration of the Passover, held the next day, is what becomes our Good Friday, is the day Christ is crucified as the sacrificial lamb to take away the sins of the world. Which is an echo of the same way the Hebrews in Egypt put the blood of lambs on their doorways so that the angel of death might "passover" them.

III.

Now unlike Christmas, which is celebrated on the same day each year, the actual day Christians celebrate Easter is based on the lunar calendar which Jews use to determine the celebration of Passover: it is always the 1st Sunday after the first full moon (called the Paschal moon) after the Spring Equinox (March 20). As such, Easter is termed a "moveable feast" and this explains

why it varies so much on our Roman calendar. The origin of the term “Easter is uncertain. A 6th century Biblical scholar by the name of “The Venerable” Bede, the Father of English History, claimed that the term comes from the anglo-saxon spring goddess “Eostre.” At any rate, it seems clear that Easter superseded an older pagan festival.

IV.

So there you have it folks... the ecclesiastical, theological, religious, historical, and astrophysical understanding of Easter. Now, if you are ready and will permit me, I'd like to go in a completely different direction. Has anyone here ever read or seen the Wizard of Oz? Remember when Dorothy, Toto, Scarecrow, Tin Man and the Cowardly Lion finally reach the end of the yellow brick road and gain an audience with the Wizard and they ask for his help and he says he will help them if they will prove themselves worthy by bringing him the broomstick of the wicked Witch of the West? Do you remember what happens when they finally return with said broomstick?

V.

The Wizard: Can I believe my eyes? Why have you come back?

Dorothy: Please sir, we've done what you told us. We brought you the broomstick of the Wicked Witch of the West. We melted her.

The Wizard: Oh, you liquidated her, eh? Very resourceful.

Dorothy: Yes, sir. So we'd like you to keep your promises, if you please, sir.

The Wizard: Not so fast, NOT SO FAST! I'll have to give the matter a little thought. Go away and come back tomorrow.

Dorothy: Tomorrow? Oh, but I want to go home now!

Tin Man: You've had plenty of time to think already! *Cowardly Lion:* Yeah!

The Wizard: DO NOT AROUSE THE WRATH OF THE GREAT AND POWERFUL OZ! I SAID COME BACK TOMORROW!

Dorothy: If you were really Great and Powerful, you'd keep your promises!

The Wizard: [As Toto reveals him behind a curtain] You presume to criticize the Great Oz?! You ungrateful creatures! You're lucky that I'm only holding this till tomorrow instead of the next TWENTY YEARS from now! [They notice him] Er... the Great Oz has spoken. [Redraws the curtain hastily] PAY NO ATTENTION TO THAT MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN! THE GREAT, er... OZ... HAS SPOKEN!!

VI.

This morning I would like to draw back the curtain on Easter. You have already heard the Resurrection Story found in Matthew's gospel. Now I would like to read to you the Resurrection Story found in John (20:1-18):

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark,
Mary Magdalene came to the tomb
and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb.
So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple,
the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them,
“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb,
and we do not know where they have laid him.”

Then Peter and the other disciple
set out and went toward the tomb.

The two were running together, but the other disciple
outran Peter and reached the tomb first.

He bent down to look in and saw
the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in.

Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb.

He saw the linen wrappings lying there,
and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head,
not lying with the linen wrappings
but rolled up in a place by itself.

Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first,
also went in, and he saw and believed;
for as yet they did not understand the scripture,
that he must rise from the dead.

Then the disciples returned to their homes.

Now I ask you, how can this be? How can the single most important event in the Bible, and in the history of the church, be so different from one Gospel to the next? I mean which Resurrection story *is* it? The one with a great earthquake, an angel rolling back a stone, guards trembling and Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. Or, it is it the *other* one which includes Peter and the Beloved Disciple on a much calmer morning with two much more

subdued angels? Does Mary M. recognize Jesus or not? Does Jesus say “Greetings” to Mary like it’s just another day? Or, does Jesus recognize the great emotion of the moment and, instead ask Mary, “Why are you weeping?”

VII.

Now don’t get me wrong, the basics of these two resurrection stories are the same: there is a resurrection, and the first person to whom it is revealed is Mary Magdalene. Beyond that, though, the details get pretty blurry. So blurry in fact, you’d be tempted to throw the baby out with the bath water. You would think that given the importance of the Resurrection there would be just *one* Resurrection story! You would think that the Gospel writers would have gotten their stories straight. Or, failing that, you’d think the early church would have worked out the kinks a bit on this thing when they were putting together the Biblical canon back in the day. Especially given their apparent willingness to fudge on just about everything else. Clearly, though, this did not happen, did it? So the truth of Easter is that what we celebrate is not a Resurrection Story but, rather, Resurrection Stories...*plural*.

VIII.

So, this Easter morning, we have a choice to make. We can either ignore what we *know* to be behind the curtain, or we can *work* with it. Now, lots of Christians choose to ignore or somehow iron out the inconsistencies behind the curtain, attributing them to this or that. I suppose for these folks this is fine solution resulting in just *one* Resurrection story which happened way back when, and in one particular way. However, for the rest of us, I’d like to suggest that accepting the Great Oz to actually be an old dude pulling levers behind a curtain means that rather than just *one* story about Christ’s Resurrection, Easter morning gets to be about how the Resurrection is the basic plot line to *all* the stories of the world. Stories which include all the blurry details of our *own* lives into these Resurrection stories which are still, and even now, unfolding.

IX.

The Wizard of Oz is the story of a young woman who really just wants to go home. Yet, it takes an epic journey through Oz for her to finally realize that home was always there waiting for her. All she needed to do was act on her hope. Easter morning is the story of a young man who really wants *all* of us to go home to God. Yet, sometimes it takes the epic journey which is life, for us

to finally realize that the home which Christ has won for us on the cross, is already here waiting for us. All *we* need to do is act on our hope.

X.

The Resurrection story as found in the bible is akin to an instructive documentary filmed in black and white. Watch it, or read it, and you'll get the gist of what God is up to in the world. However, the *stories* of Resurrection which are to be found in *each* of our lives are what bring the spectacular color to Easter Sunday morning. Not just Easter morning, though, but to *every* morning for all of our days and, especially, at the *end* of our days. All of which is truly a hope that is worth acting on. Amen.