Text: Matthew 28:1-10

**Introduction**

There is the story, and then there is the meaning we place on the story.

Take a step away from the gospels for one second onto something less immediately fraught. We do this all the time. We can tell a story about Dad taking us to the ball game. The first time you tell it, it is probably a bit of bragging to buddies, “Yeah, Dad took me to see our favorite team.” The emphasis is on I got to see the game. But if you are telling that story in your 20’s, it is probably a bit of early nostalgia at how simple things were when you were a kid. And when you tell it to your kids, it’s probably when you are going to the game. And it’s a story about the connection of one generation to the next. Queue up “America has rolled by like an army of steamrollers…”. The story is a father, a son and game. There are multiple meanings, and none of them erase any of the others. They layer. As an old hymn would say, “swiftly down time’s deepening stream.”

I start with that for two reasons. For many of us here today, in relation to this story – the Jesus story – we are very deep down that stream. I could throw out words like Triduum, and not explain them. The three day service of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Moring. The hymns and songs from the spooky Christ is Arisen which comes out of the deep middle ages, maybe the first millennium, to This is the Feast, a work commissioned within our lifetimes. And we easily could have added a hymn that stretched back to the 4th century. These are all part of our formation. But there are also those here today, and maybe more importantly not here today, who are hearing the story if not with absolutely fresh ears, with ears just hearing the story and maybe starting to attach meaning, at the start of the stream.

That is both the frightening thing about our time, and an amazing hope. There is always the sense that every new generation hears the story for the first time. But I don’t think I’m wrong in saying this one is unique. We have an opportunity to hear the story back to that bit bragging about the event itself.

**Text**

The old joke is that there are only two constants – death and taxes. But even taxes can be cheated. Death, death doesn’t seem to lose. Except in this story.

And it is a story that comes originally from a couple of women. We collectively left the two Mary’s on Good Friday staring at the tomb. Numb, cold, just staring opposite the tomb. A week ago Lazarus was being raised and Jesus was entering Jerusalem as King, and yet somehow we are back at the tomb. How did it come to this. Maybe their minds started to return to the things we all do in such times. It’s was the Sabbath and their would be rituals to perform. You start putting one foot in front of the other in familiar paths. And that grieving, that meaning making is put on hold for day. I suppose I should explain one thing there. We measure time. These two Mary’s and their world would have counted. So Jesus dies on Friday before sunset, 1 day. Sunset Friday to Sunset Saturday, 2 days. And now they are back at dawn on Sunday, day 3. We’d **measure** a long day, Friday evening to early Sunday morning, but they count. And they are heading back to the tomb – after that rote Sabbath - to pick up grief.

But that isn’t what they get. What they get is an earthquake, and a angel rolling back the stone, and the guards that had been sent to prevent exactly that petrified like the man who was supposed to be inside. The angel ignores them. Not even a head nod. He talks to the Mary’s. “Don’t be afraid.” Sure, whatever you say, majestic being whose appearance in like lightening and clothing white as snow.

Don’t be afraid. I know why you are here. You are looking for Jesus, the crucified one. He’s not here, he’s risen, as he said. [Pause]

I see you don’t believe me. Or maybe don’t understand what I am saying. I get it. This is new. Nobody cheats death. “Come, see the place where he lay.”

I don’t know about you, but when I’m reading a story I occasionally break or have an internal monolog about it. What are we to take about this? We know that the tomb was sealed. We know that the guards were posted. We saw – unbelievable I know – but we saw this majestic being roll away the stone. We know the body isn’t here. How did it get out? Can this risen one walk through things like stone and standing guards? Maybe doors? Well we know that Jesus seemed to have a way in life of walking through crowds that wanted to throw him off cliffs.

Ok, you are back. Tomb is empty, right? Got it? Now I’ve got a job. “Go tell his disciples that he has risen. Tell them to go to Galilee. They will see him there. See, I’ve told you. You go tell them.”

What does it even mean he’s risen? It isn’t exactly like Lazarus. When Jesus raised him he had to tell us to roll away the stone. But this tomb was already empty. The lightning one rolled it away so we could see it was empty. But what does it mean? Nobody is ever going to believe this. And what was that bit at the end?

But somehow the Mary’s head on back with a mixture of fear and joy. Maybe part of the fear is forgetting the second part of the message. Because while they are running back. The formerly dead man greets them – “Greetings.” And I swear, don’t make fun of me for this, but this is the second bit of proof in Matthew, the what does this mean. “They took hold of his feet.” Because ghosts don’t have feet. The tomb is empty, and Jesus has feet. And what is the purpose of this appearance? “tell my brothers to go to Galilee.” I know you didn’t quite get that. Understandable. Not every day someone beats death. See, I’m always looking out for you. Now go, tell them. The tomb is empty, I have feet, I’ll see them in Galilee.

**Application**

You can’t make that story up. I’m sorry. I know that every cynic and critical scholar and the entire horde of faithless preachers want to explain it away. It was written long after the fact. It’s a spiritual story.

Hogwash.

The gospels don’t read like the work of a Master of Fine Arts polishing the great Judean Novel. That’s a personal memory. That’s someone bragging at bit, let me tell you what I got to see to friends. The angel and the terrified guards he just ignores. The empty tomb and the feet. And oh man, we almost blew it, we forgot where they were supposed to go. But Jesus shows up and reminds us.

Someone beat death. And that someone looks out for us. Wants to see us.

Would you like to see him? We can tell you where He is.