

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. ²Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb ³and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

⁴But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. ⁵As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

⁶"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"

⁸Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

The women were worried. The Sabbath was over, so they were finally able to return to Jesus' tomb to give him a proper burial, and there was a lot on their minds. Two days ago, their world got turned upside down: The Jesus they loved and believed was the Promised Savior had been crucified. They were there. They saw it. They followed to where his lifeless body had been laid in a tomb.

And now, as they returned two days later, they were worried. With everything else on their minds, they had forgotten about the stone. It was huge; the men struggled to roll it in front of Jesus' tomb after burying him. They weren't strong enough to move it. So they worried as they walked: "**Who will roll the stone away?**"

What about you? As we walk to the empty tomb this morning, are you carrying any worries with you? Maybe like them, about some problem in your life that's too big for you? Are you worried about your health? Your finances? Your loved ones? Your future? I don't know what it is, but I bet there's something. Because worry comes so naturally to us. We get used to it, live as if it's a necessary evil, a weight we have to carry around with us.

But that's just not true. The women found out that day that Jesus' resurrection made their worry needless: As they got closer, they looked up and saw that the stone had already been rolled away. And it makes our worries needless, too. Jesus showed you on Good Friday no one loves you more than he does. He suffered hell to save you. He died rather than lose you! Now, he shows you no one's more powerful than he is. Christ is risen! Not even death could hold him down. And now the one who loves you more than life and is more powerful than death lives and reigns over everything in this universe. Whatever worries you – it's in his loving, powerful hands. Easter means an end to worry!

But for the women, worry turned to fear. They step into the tomb, and Jesus isn't there. But an angel is. And did you notice their reaction? They were alarmed. I don't think it was just a, "Oh, you startled us!" Matthew tells us this same angel had the Roman soldiers guarding the tomb so scared they fell on their faces like dead men. What's so scary about an angel? Well, they are sinless...and we are sinners. Being in the presence of holiness terrifies us, because we don't match up, and we know what we deserve because of it.

But all of us are going to have to stand in the presence of holiness one day. Not just a holy angel...but the Holy God. All of us will have to stand before him as our judge. None of the excuses we make for our sins will work with him. All of the sins we hide are seen by him – even ones we’re not aware of. Doesn’t the thought of it already strike fear into our hearts?

Ah, but listen to God’s message to the women and to you! **Don’t be afraid.** And most importantly, hear why: **You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified.** Yes, Jesus was crucified. And when he was, the God who knows all your sins took every last one, and placed them on his Son. The Judge condemned Jesus for your sins and gave him the punishment you deserved for them until he died.

But a dead Savior can’t save anyone. A dead Savior does you no good. So listen to the angel: **He has risen! He is not here.** Follow his finger to **the place where he was laid**, but is no more and never will be again. Because once and for all, he paid for this world’s sins, and God’s proof to the world is the empty tomb. Easter means your sins are forgiven, your guilt is gone, you can stand before the Judge without fear.

But maybe you think it’s all too good to be true. That your failures are too big for God to forgive; that you’ve sinned one too many times for him to take you back. Listen to what the angel says next: **But go, tell his disciples and Peter.** Was there any bigger failure Holy Week than Peter? Swears he’ll die for Jesus, then abandons him. Swears he’ll never disown him, then does three times in the span of a few minutes. Unlike these women, too scared to be at the cross, hiding in fear. And yet whom does God include by name as a recipient of Easter’s good news? Peter. Easter means his sins are forgiven, too. No matter how big, so are yours.

But there’s one last thing the women learned that morning, and we’d do well to learn it, too. The angel continues: **He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.** Oh, yeah. Jesus had told them, time and again, he’d rise. They went to finish burying a dead Jesus, but they should have gone looking for him alive. Jesus kept his promise.

And if a dead Jesus kept his promise to rise, won’t your living Savior keep all his promises to you? That your past is forgiven. Your present and future are in his hands. And of course this one: “Because I live, you also will live.” That death won’t be your end, either. That Jesus will raise you to life eternal. In life and in death, Easter means certainty because Jesus keeps his promises.

Yet the women ran from the tomb...still afraid and uncertain. Seems they had a hard time wrapping their hearts around this good news. And so do we. I’m not under the impression that you’ll leave today and never worry, feel guilty, or be afraid again. But doesn’t that show us we need to walk with the women to the tomb more often than once a year? Even more than once a week? To find the peace, confidence, joy this truth gives: Christ is risen! Amen.