

**Matthew 28    Matthew's Resurrection Story - Earthquakes and Angels    April 5, 2026**

It is so good to see you all this morning. Familiar faces, unfamiliar faces, members, and family members of members. It's good to be with all of you. Whether this is your first time here or not, consider yourself at home. I hope that this morning has been a happy one for you. I hope you didn't feel rushed or stressed to be here. Choir, I bet you might have felt rushed getting here by 7:15. Thank you for spending so much of your Easter with me. I just hope that, in the future, when you all look back on this day, you have peaceful, joyful, happy memories.

Easter often comes in one of two flavors. I'm not talking about chocolate vs. jelly beans. I'm talking about styles of worship. Two kinds, and we all have our favorites. There's the over-the-top victory flavor with trumpets and tympanies and hands raised in joyful praise. That one's fun and energetic right off the bat.

And then there's the quieter sunrise-type services. Something that starts off respectful of the stillness of the new day, with worshippers entering the sanctuary with lingering grief, a residual heaviness after the events of Good Friday. In those services, you approach the sanctuary the way you imagine Mary approaching the tomb. Still in shock. Still tearful.

I've been to both kinds of services in my years. I've been woken by my grandmother Virginia, my namesake, before dawn and we've tiptoed out of the house, careful not to wake my parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, or cousins scattered on every mattress and couch in the house. We've quietly celebrated Easter as the sun has risen on the new day.

And I've thrown my head back in shouts of joy as a jazz band welcomed us into the sanctuary and carried us through the hour and for their finale played the Halleluia Chorus as the postlude and everyone danced and clapped along.

Easter is special no matter how you celebrate it, whatever the flavor, but if you think that that's what the first Easter was like my friends, Matthew would like to have a word with you. His resurrection story goes like this.

After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. <sup>2</sup>And suddenly there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. <sup>3</sup>His appearance was like lightning and his clothing white as snow. <sup>4</sup>For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. <sup>5</sup>But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. <sup>6</sup>He is not here, for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. <sup>7</sup>Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message for you.” <sup>8</sup>So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to tell his disciples. <sup>9</sup>Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. <sup>10</sup>Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers and sisters to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

This is the wild, amazing, terrifying, hurried, life-changing word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

See, according to his Gospel, Easter begins like a sunrise service. We can envision the two Marys tiptoeing out of the place where the people who loved Jesus best were huddled together sleeping and heading to the tomb in silence. They were going to care for the body of Jesus as soon as the dawn would give them light, and we imagine a Thomas Kinkade-esque, Hallmark card cover worthy, calm sunrise journey. We might imagine birds sweetly singing their greetings to the new day as they walk. We might envision lilies and daffodils and tulips turning toward the warmth of the morning light – symbolic visions of new life. It’s just peaceful, and an angel meets them there to announce that all is well, and we sigh and smile at the thought.

But everything changes when they arrive at the tomb. There is no soft morning light or even trumpets and shouts of joy. Instead, there’s an earthquake. A literal shaking of the ground beneath their feet. A disruption so fierce it rattles the stones and the soldiers and the women.

Easter, Matthew tells us, is not calm. It is not polite. It is not the spiritual equivalent of a sunrise yoga class. Nor is it a celebratory party with angelic fanfare. In his gospel, Easter is an earthquake.

And right in the middle of that shaking, an angel appears — not a cute, little, chubby-faced cherub whose smile disarms you with cuteness, but a divine being - bright as lightning, fierce as fire, physics-defyingly strong, sitting casually on the stone that had sealed the tomb shut moments before. I love that detail. The angel was not standing near it. Not hovering above it, but sitting on it. As if to say, *“This obstacle? This barrier? This symbol of death’s finality? I’ve rolled it over here, and it’s my seat now. I want the best view of your faces when you realize Jesus is not here.”*

Earthquakes and angels. That’s how Matthew’s Resurrection Story begins.

The first Easter was a holy upheaval, chaotic and loud and frightening. It was God breaking open the world. It was heaven refusing to stay quiet any longer. It was the earth itself convulsing with the news that death had lost its grip on us.

And the women—Mary Magdalene and the other Mary—are caught in the middle of it. They came quietly, expecting to tend to a body. They came grieving and expecting to grieve. They came expecting the predictable rituals of mourning.

Instead, the ground literally moves beneath them. The stone is rolled away, and the Roman guards faint. The tough, physically intimidating, Roman soldiers hit the ground and don’t get up.

And an angel looks the women in their eyes and says the most ridiculous words:

“Do not be afraid.”

Yeah, right! Do not be afraid. Not likely.

There’s a lie going viral on the internet right now that the actual translation of “do not be afraid” is “Please, stop screaming.” It’s not true at all. There’s nothing to suggest that

“please, stop screaming” is a legitimate translation, but you have to admit, it might not be that far from the truth.

If I were in an earthquake, I might scream. If I saw soldiers faint, I might scream. If I saw a lightning bolt of a heavenly being move a massive rock and then hop up and park itself on top of that rock, I might scream. And I’m not normally a screamer.

But the angel says what angels say throughout scripture. “Do not be afraid.” Not because the situation is calm. Not because everything makes sense. Not because the world is suddenly safe. But because God is doing something so alive, so disruptive, so world-shaking that fear is not allowed to be the final word here.

“Do not be afraid,” the angel says, “for he is not here. He has been raised. Go and tell the others that he will meet you in Galilee.”

And so, they take off, they leave the entrance of the tomb and head to the disciples, running it says, in fear and in joy; and along the way, Jesus himself appears. Not in a blaze of glory. Not with trumpets or choirs. If he showed up like the angel had done, the women might have fainted, too, but on the road, in the midst of their stunned journey, it seems that Jesus just can’t wait to be reunited with Mary and Mary.

The angel had said, “He’ll meet you in Galilee,” but instead, Jesus meets them exactly where they are.

And he says, “Greetings,” or in other words, “hey.” Just as if everything from the last three days had been a bad dream. The women fall at his feet. They cling to him. They worship him. And Jesus then repeats the angel’s words: “Do not be afraid.” (Or maybe, “Please, stop screaming.” It still fits.)

Now they’ve seen for themselves. They’ve touched him. Now the ground has stopped shaking, now the lightning bolt of an angel has disappeared. But I imagine their hearts are still racing. I imagine everything’s still like a tsunami of confusion and doubt and ecstatic wonder and lingering fear.

But that's just it. Easter is not the absence of chaos and fear. Easter is the presence of Christ in the middle of it. The joy that outweighs the fear. The fear is still there. The chaos is still there. Things still don't make sense, but we're deciding in the midst of it to believe the impossible.

Easter is about the God who shakes the earth dramatically and then meets us on the road casually. The God who overturns death with earthquakes and angels and then speaks our names with tenderness and calms our hearts and minds. The God who disrupts everything that destroys us and then sends us out with courage.

We live in a world that feels like a constant earthquake. The ground is shifting beneath us — politically, socially, personally. We lose people and things we thought were permanent. We face diagnoses, heartbreaks, disappointments, uncertainties. The status quo, what we have taken for granted, no longer gives us confidence. We know what it is to tremble. But Easter tells us this: God does some of God's best work when the ground beneath us is shaking.

Resurrection doesn't wait for calm conditions. Hope doesn't require a peaceful backdrop. New life doesn't emerge only when everything is stable. Nor do we pretend on Easter that everything is going perfectly well and predictably.

Easter happens in the midst of the upheaval. Easter happens when the stone rolls and the ground quakes. Easter happens when angels sit on the very things that once sealed us either in or out.

So, if your life feels unsteady, if something in you is trembling, if the world feels loud and chaotic and uncertain—take heart. You are standing on resurrection ground.

Christ is risen. The earth itself is shaking with the news. And the angels are already sitting on the stones we thought would never move. This Easter is not quiet and reflective; nor is it entirely victorious and confident, but it's the flavor of Easter I need this year. Alleluia. Amen.