

Sermon – Matthew 28:1-10
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Grace Lutheran Church
Easter – Year A
5 April 2026

“A Guarded Hope”

Friends in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! **He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!**

1. This past Wednesday evening, just before 5:30, the boys and I opened up my laptop in our kitchen. While I don't follow everything that NASA does, this felt different. The Artemis II mission, after all, is the first crewed mission to the moon in my lifetime. And I'm old! It's been a while since we've done this. Tomorrow, their spaceship *Integrity* will make its lunar flyby, after which the four astronauts will begin their journey home. You know, I heard they were originally going to land on the moon but decided not to when they couldn't get a dinner reservation. Turns out the restaurant on the moon was *full*. Probably not a big loss. I mean the food is fine, but the place has no *atmosphere*. I'm sorry. I did want to have a better joke this morning, but I didn't have time to *planet*. But I really did find myself gripped by the launch. Maybe because it's a powerful reminder of what humanity can achieve. Or perhaps because it underscores just how vast God's good creation is, and that we occupy a very small spot within it. Maybe it was just nice that humans were launching something without aiming it at someone else. We watched with bated breath as the countdown neared zero, with excitement, yes, but also with fear. These things can go horribly wrong. In that moment, both outcomes – the good and the bad – were possible. What would happen next?

2. We come this Easter morning once again to the tomb. We've been here before, but this year feels different. We are not, of course, the same people we were a year ago. And Matthew gives us different details. In Matthew's telling alone, the women do not find the stone already rolled away. In Matthew's telling alone, imperial guards were present at the tomb. The point, of course, is not to quibble about which gospel gets the facts precisely right. They all point to the truth that matters most. But stepping into Matthew's narrative makes it all seem so impossible. The stone, seen through the loving, grieving eyes of Mary and Mary, is still very much there, as solid as ever. And so are their Roman occupiers. As if crucifying their friend and Lord wasn't enough, Rome will police even their mourning in the morning. What will happen next? The women know this story. Jesus is dead and life, bleak and grey, will go on. Until it doesn't. So has it ever been.

3. And then, with a quaking of the earth and an angel come from heaven, everything changes. The once-invincible guards are paralyzed in fear. The so-solid stone is not just rolled away; it becomes a chair for the angel. And Jesus, whom they saw die through tear-filled eyes just days ago? Jesus is not here; he got out before the stone was even moved. The women, with fear and great joy, are met by Jesus on the way. Not an idea or a memory or a theology, but Jesus. Flesh and bone. He who was dead is alive. Nothing will ever be the same. After all, as theologian and friend of Grace Jaroslav Pelikan once said, "If Christ is risen, nothing else matters. And if Christ is not risen – nothing else matters." Christ risen and everything is changed.

4. Thank God. Matthew's gospel feel like the right one for this year. Because the stone of death and the presence of Empire feel so very real this year. Since last Easter, our congregation has suffered unfathomable loss. Our nation and world seem out of control. We are mired in a war that lacks purpose and direction. Our very faith is being coopted by those who deal in death, not life.

For any number of reasons, in the midst of our joyful alleluias, maybe you arrive at the tomb today with a broken heart, a deep fear, a sense that there is no way forward. The stone is so heavy. Death and sin are so real. But Easter is not putting on a brave face or pretending to joy you do not feel. Your grief and sorrow are welcome within God's grief and sorrow. And precisely because our suffering is taken up into the suffering of our God, the suffering does not get the last word. Stand with Mary and Mary a moment. Take a deep breath. And know the angel's words are for you: "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised." What happens next is that nothing will ever be the same again. Your sins are forever left behind in the tomb. Dawn stretches out forever in the new creation. Death itself is dead, powerless to hold our loved ones, and all the saints, and one day us, too, who will live with the risen Christ.

5. Our eyes have been drawn to the heavens this week. As we explore the distant stars, we also remember that we worship the down-to-earth God. Paul encourages us to set our minds on the things that are above. But we need not look far, for the crucified and risen Christ is present here, now, today. Heaven has broken into this world, and its doors forever stand open. As Mary and Mary embraced him on that first morning, so, too, does Jesus put himself into our hands today. The body and blood of the crucified and risen Lord given for you. For each of you. For all of you. Gifts of the God who shows no partiality but makes space for all in the unending reign of the Lamb once slain. What will happen next? Who can say? But I know what will happen last. The risen Christ will be all in all. Death defeated. Sin forgiven. Evil and empire put forever to flight. And this last shall last forever as we, raised with Christ, dwell together in the presence of the God who journeyed from heaven to earth for you. Amen.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! **He is risen, indeed. Alleluia!**

And now may the peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.