

April 21, 2019

Lesson 8: Called to Proclaim the Resurrection

Scripture: Matthew 25: 1-15

Context:

Our lesson moves to another part of our call that we celebrate on Easter Sunday. We are reminded that we are called to proclaim the resurrection and to celebrate the joy and hope of Easter. With our lives we are called to rejoice that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead!

Each of the gospels gives an account of Jesus's resurrection with a twist. As we have been diving through the Gospel of Matthew about call, it makes sense we look at the details of Matthew's resurrection narrative to see how the word is defined.

In the case of Matthew's resurrection narrative, there are lots of details that almost test its credibility, particularly for modern readers. There is the talk of angels, a massive earthquake, guards being paralyzed, and then chief priests covering everything up. It's as if the later part of the narrative is to explain the whole thing. The disciples stole Jesus's body to make their story more credible.

Yet it is important to remember that these details are actually meant to help the audience understand everything that happened in the larger scheme of things. Variations in other accounts of Jesus demonstrate that early Christians were not always concerned with the accuracy of detail.¹ They are more interested in the story itself. If the details do not match up, that doesn't take away from the truth of the story.

Matthew's account of the resurrection is also one that includes an appearance of Jesus to the women as they flee the tomb. Only in John do we have Mary Magdalene encountering the risen Christ (John 27:55-56). As Jesus meets Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, he greets them with a welcome that translates to "rejoice."² But Jesus also gives them a commission. They are to tell his brothers, the disciples, that he is going to Galilee and they will see him again. It is a powerful moment as these women play an indispensable role as witnesses to the power of God.³ They are the first missionaries to tell of the good news of Jesus's resurrection.

The narrative closes with a description of how the story spreads outside the church and how others will interpret the story. It is given a political overtone so that the governor does not get involved and cause trouble. What is interesting is that we do have outside confirmations of this particular rumor spreading throughout the land. Justin Martyr, a church father, later reported on the story and the fact that it had spread to the

¹ Douglas R.A. Hare, "Matthew," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press; Louisville, KY, 1990), 328.

² *Ibid.*, 330.

³ *Ibid.*, 331

Jewish community and this became the “truth” for those outside Christian communities.⁴ But no one could stop the early church from what they had to share.

Application

Of all the gospel accounts of the resurrection, this one perhaps has the most details and is loaded with lessons. Most important in this narrative is the fact that the women who followed Jesus are given a twofold commission. First, they are to rejoice at what has happened with the phrase that has been translated: “Do not be afraid.” What an incredible start to the good news of Jesus rising from the dead. Secondly, they are to go and tell others how to respond to the news and give instructions for what comes next.

I love that on Easter morning we are discussing how we are the ones who are called to celebrate the joy and hope of Easter as we proclaim the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We often think of Easter as a list of things to do: clothes to iron, preparations to be made by our various help groups at church, and family traditions to observe. But in this text we are reminded that the first and foremost thing we are called to do is to celebrate the resurrection. It is a day of rejoicing and a day where we are reminded that we have a story to tell.

One thing that Easter should inspire us to do is think about our testimony and how we have felt God at work resurrecting us. I do not mean necessarily being “born again” or rededicating your faith. I mean being able to share with others in a way that tells how we have felt God at work in us and in the lives of those around us. All of us have a story to tell and God is in the midst of it. It may even be that God is standing fast with us as things are messy or complicated.

Another thing that this lesson tells us is that we are to share the good news with others about the resurrection. These women were the first people God selected to tell the story and to share good news. We are reminded that it isn’t just preachers or teachers who are to tell people about Jesus. It is every day people. These women thought they were just going to prepare a tomb and anoint Jesus’s body. Instead, they were told that they were called to do something else for God’s kingdom. They were called to tell the story of Jesus and the power of his resurrection.

We also hear in this resurrection narrative that there will always be those who try to cover up good news and explain everything away. That is the case of the rumors that are spread about Jesus’s resurrection and the way that others try to silence the power of God. If it doesn’t fit into the timetable or story of someone else, it is easy to explain it away.

In today’s modern world, we have people who want an answer for everything. Even with my analytical nature, I tend to constantly ask “why” and try to discover how things happen the way they do. While I think it is always important to research, study, and ask deep questions, I do think there is power in mysteries and incredible things that no amount of data could explain. That is the same with the resurrection. People can try to explain what happened and decipher every possibility about the how of Jesus’s resurrection. But I think that misses the point. Today we are simply to marvel and be in awe of the Savior who defeated death and invites all humanity to rejoice with him that death never has the final say.

⁴ Ibid., 328.

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