

**April 23-24, 2011 / Easter**

**Title:** *For Thine Is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory, Forever and Ever. Amen!*

**Theme:** *Grief, sorrow, and mourning are over. Through death, Christ has triumphed over death and now is alive as the new king who reigns in the kingdom of God. When we say "Amen" we are agreeing together, "Yes, yes it is going to come about just like this."*

**Texts:** Jeremiah 31:1-6 and Matthew 28:1-10

Notes on the Texts

### **Jeremiah 31:1-6**

Jeremiah was called to be a prophet to Judah (the southern kingdom during the era of a divided nation) in the years leading up to the Assyrian invasion, destruction of Jerusalem and the temple and deportation of the population. Jeremiah's role was to help God's people make sense of their experience. Much of Jeremiah's message was warning God's people of the consequences of their sin, in particular their injustices against the poor, the orphan and the widow. Because God's people continued in their sinful ways God used the nation of Assyria to punish them and call them back to faithfulness.

Today's passage is from what is commonly called the Book of Consolation, comprised of Jeremiahs 30-31. In these chapters, the tone shifts from warning and woe to the promise of restoration and renewal of life following the exile. For Jeremiah, this is not a promise of cheap grace, but a dawn that will only come at the end of a long, dark night.

God's restoration will encompass all of Israel ("all the families of Israel) showing just how wide God's grace will be. Because of the depth of God's covenant love the nation will be rebuilt. It will experience a rebirth, a new beginning ("virgin Israel"). No matter how heinous their sin, God's mercy and grace will win the day.

The repetition of the word "again" in verses 4-5 highlights God's restoration. Whereas earlier prophetic traditions spoke of the frustration of planting vineyards without enjoying the wine and building homes without living in them, Jeremiah assures the people that they will rejoice at the abundance that awaits them. Not only that, but Jeremiah promises that the day will come when the guards will call the people to pilgrimage to Jerusalem, a clear promise that the once-destroyed temple will be rebuilt and the glory of the Lord will dwell in the holy city once again.

As we move from Lent into Easter, this passage moves us from lamentation to celebration. It holds the promise of new life, a kind of resurrection after dark days of oppression. Not a bad passage to digest on the day of Resurrection. By God's grace we, too, move daily from bondage to freedom, guilt to forgiveness, death to life.

### **Matthew 28:1-10**

Matthew sets the story of Easter on the first day of the week (Sunday) at the dawn of the new day. This is Matthew's not-so-subtle way of letting us know that in the resurrection of Jesus something stunningly new has happened.

Twice in Matthew's account we hear a commissioning to tell the other disciples that Jesus is risen and that he will meet them in Galilee. According to Luther Seminary professor, Arland Hultgren, "Galilee has special meaning for Matthew. At Matthew 4:15-16 (quoting from Isaiah 9:1-2) it is called "Galilee of the Gentiles." Galilee is, we might say, the "doorway to the world."

In both Isaiah and Matthew the light of divine revelation is to extend to the Gentiles. The gospel is for the nations, not just Israel.” (1)

One of the truly stunning features of the Gospels is that this commission to bear witness to the resurrection of Jesus is given to women. In the ancient world women never served as witnesses. In fact, they could not legally serve as witnesses in a court of law. The point being that God consistently uses the most surprising of people to accomplish God’s plan of redemption. Even women. Even us.

As NT Wright has clarified for the listening world what is at work on Easter morning is resurrection...bodily resurrection. We are not celebrating a resuscitated corpse. Jesus’ body obviously bears similarities to his earthly body (he apparently retained the holes from the nails and spears) but this body has been spiritually transformed as well (he can appear and disappear at will). Matthew’s choice to record the fact that guards were present at the tomb only serves to reinforce the reality that Jesus’ body had not been stolen, as was common in the ancient world when it came to the bodies of popular figures. Matthew does not leave a single question as to the very center of this event: Jesus has been resurrected!

### **Preaching Possibilities**

While the center of Easter is the resurrection of Jesus, the central question for worship is, “So what?” Why does it really matter for you or me or anyone else that Jesus is resurrected? I would dare to guess that if asked that very question the vast majority of worshipers would struggle to give an answer that gave them nearly as much satisfaction as a chocolate bunny or a Cadbury egg.

The meaning of Easter, however, is both central and profound both in terms of the Christian faith and the daily life of disciples. Here are just a few of the implications:

1. It is God’s vindication and confirmation of Jesus’ mission and ministry. Resurrection is God’s “Amen” to Jesus’ life, mission and ministry. We may be captivated by Jesus’ life and teachings but the resurrection puts real “teeth” into Jesus’ promises.
2. It is a foretaste of the Kingdom of God in which all wrongs will be righted, justice and love win the day and life trumps death. So begins the final movement of God which will culminate in Jesus’ return when heaven and earth unite. We are invited to live into this new reality and reveal it here and now. The resurrection is God’s “Amen” to human history.
3. It is the assurance of our own resurrection. We do not die go to heaven to sit forever in the clouds to play our harps. We will be resurrected. The resurrection is God’s “Amen” in our own living and dying.

In light of God’s great “Amen” of resurrection we are invited to live fearlessly and purposefully. Without faith in the resurrection we are compelled to dabble in death-dealing ways that give the illusion of life – worshiping at the altars of gods named power, money and sex. If this life is all there is, why not? But resurrection opens a new and endless horizon, setting us free to live beyond ourselves because we are caught up in something so much greater than ourselves: the grand plan of God’s redemption, reconciliation and recreation of all things.

(1) [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?lect\\_date=3/23/2008&tab=4](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?lect_date=3/23/2008&tab=4)