

Easter Sunday Reflection

Matthew 28:1–10

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I have always had the mantra at Easter time that says, “there cannot be a resurrection without a crucifixion”. It was one of the themes at an Easter Camp I attended back in my days as Youth Co-ordinator of the PCANZ. I remember going there prepared to speak and when I saw the group of young people present, I threw my speech out the window and ad-libbed the whole thing expecting a more diverse crowd but it was predominantly pakeha and I had to contextualise on the spot. I always believe in being relevant and being able to relate and connect with the people I’m speaking to. If it doesn’t fit or feel right, toss it aside.

The Easter story, as told in Gospel of Matthew 28:1–10, begins not with triumph but with fear. Before there is proclamation or certainty, there is uncertainty. And before there is resurrection joy, there is grief carried by two women, Mary Magdalene and Matthews says “the other Mary” most likely the mother of Jesus was there more than 2 Mary’s? They were walking toward the tomb.

The women come at dawn, that liminal space between darkness and light. They come not expecting resurrection, but to mourn. This is a crucial detail. The first witnesses to Easter are not those with certainty or power. They are those who show up in love, even when hope seems gone.

And perhaps that is where Easter begins for us today. Not in certainty, but in showing up.

Matthew tells us that there was a great earthquake. The earth itself trembles. Creation responds. The stone is rolled away not so that Jesus can get out, but so that the women can see in. This is not a quiet resurrection. It is disruptive.

Some of us speak of God not as an intervening force from outside the world, but as the deep pulse of life within it. Here, the earthquake becomes a powerful symbol. Resurrection is a radical reordering of reality. The systems that held death in place are shaken. The stone, symbol of finality, oppression, sealed endings, is moved.

How many stones do we know in our own world? Stones of injustice. Stones of inequality. Stones that seal people into tombs of poverty, exclusion, and despair. Easter is not simply about one man rising long ago. It is about every stone that needs to be rolled away now.

The angel speaks to the women. Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid is not a denial of fear. It is an invitation to move through it.

Through death and grief we might understand faith not as the absence of fear, but as courage in the midst of it. These women are not suddenly fearless. They are faithful. And the angel continues. He is not here, for he has been raised. Not he raised himself. Not God raised him as a display of power. But he has been raised. Here resurrection here is not explained. It is experienced.

One of the great tensions in Easter theology is how we understand resurrection. Is it a literal reversal of death? Or is it something deeper, a transformation of reality itself?

In progressive theology, we often resist readings that turn resurrection into a kind of supernatural proof. Instead, we lean into its meaning as transformation. The life of Jesus, his love, his justice, his way of being in the world, cannot be contained by death.

The tomb is empty not because a body has simply been resuscitated, but because death does not have the final word over a life lived in radical love. This matters today.

Because we live in a world where death still seems powerful. War, violence, ecological crisis, systemic injustice. If Easter is only about what happened to Jesus, it risks becoming disconnected from our lived reality. But if Easter is about the enduring power of love, justice, and hope, then it speaks directly into our world.

It is no accident that the first witnesses are women. In a first century context where women's testimony was often dismissed, Matthew places them at the very centre of the resurrection story. They are the ones who see. They are the ones who hear. They are the ones who are sent.

Go and tell my brothers. They become the first apostles, the first proclaimers of resurrection.

This is profoundly significant; it challenges patriarchal structures. It disrupts assumptions about authority. It affirms that those on the margins are often the first to encounter new life.

Who are the women at the tomb in our world today? Perhaps they are those whose voices have been silenced. Women, indigenous communities, migrants, the poor, the excluded. Perhaps they are the ones who see resurrection before the rest of us do.

Easter invites us not only to celebrate resurrection, but to listen to those who are already witnessing it. Matthew tells us that the women leave the tomb with fear and great joy.

This is one of the most honest descriptions of faith in the entire Gospel where fear and joy coexist. We know this feeling. When something truly transformative happens, it is rarely neat or tidy. It is overwhelming. It is disorienting. It is both terrifying and beautiful. It resists the temptation to flatten faith into simple answers. Instead, it honours the reality that resurrection is something we grow into, not something we fully grasp.

The women run not because they understand everything, but because they have encountered something that compels them forward.

As they run, Jesus meets them.

The encounter with the risen Christ does not happen in the tomb. It happens on the way.

Faith is not found in static places of certainty. It is found in movement, in journey, in action.

And perhaps that is where we find Easter today. Not in perfect understanding, but in the act of moving toward life. Not in having all the answers, but in responding to the call to go and tell. Not in escaping the realities of our world, but in transforming them.

Easter is not the end of the story. It is the beginning of a new way of living. A way marked by courage in the face of fear. By hope in the face of despair. By love that refuses to be buried.

And so, like the women at the tomb, we are invited into this story. To show up. To witness. To run. To tell. Jesus is risen, not as a distant miracle to be admired, but as a living invitation to participate in the ongoing work of resurrection in our world. And that is both our calling and our hope.

Amen.