

# Sermon Starter – Resurrection Again and Again

*Matthew 28:1-10, John 20:1-18*

The lectionary offers no Old Testament option, with the exception of a portion of Psalm 118. Instead, two Gospel resurrection stories are included. While attempts could be made to use both John and Matthew and reconcile details, it may be more helpful to focus on only one account. A more useful complementary passage could be Colossians 3:1-4, which describes a life that has been raised with Christ. Also, if you have preached many Easter sermons, a temptation may be to find some new, never-heard-of before slant. Resist! “Jesus is alive” is the core message of the Christian faith that begs to be repeated every year and never grows old. Be reminded and remind the congregation that we have seen resurrection before (Lazarus and dry bones) and shall see it again and again. God-encounters bring new life out of death! Rejoice in this day and be glad in it!

## Additional ideas

1. In both texts, God’s best news ever begins in the most unlikely of settings, in a cemetery. If our faith can be stretched enough to believe in a God who creates celebrations in a cemetery, surely it will be a faith expansive enough to trust God for whatever else happens in life. In this place of sorrow and hushed whispers, God declares, “No more!” The grave has received a makeover, and what is over is the power of death!
2. One Matthew sermon could pay attention to the two earthquakes, one on Good Friday and again on Easter Sunday. Earthquakes are the result of a seismic shift. Earthquakes shake our once-stable world and always grab our attention. God is trying to get us to see the significance of the life-altering change that is happening. On Good Friday and Great Sunday, the earth shook and rearranged reality forever. What has gotten our attention these past six weeks?
3. Another Matthew approach is to notice the response of the women. Matthew describes their emotion as they leave the tomb as filled with joy, which is what we might expect. Recall the prodigal son and Lazarus. When the dead are later discovered alive, parties and joy result. But a second emotion tags along with joy: fear. What is fear doing here? Recall your graduation or the birth of your child. Were emotions present? Were you

full of joy, yet afraid? This is a common response when the past known reality is gone for good, and new, uncharted territory lies ahead. If God can raise the dead, imagine what God could do with the little I have to offer God! This could be a good opportunity for a “resurrection” testimony of God bringing amazing results from what was offered with joy, despite fear.

4. Notice all the running on Easter morning in John 20. Mary Magdalene is seen running from the tomb. Peter and John go racing to the tomb. Adults are not generally seen running. The older we get, the less graceful our running becomes. First-century adults running was even more rare. Pulling up garments to run literally could expose and humiliate. One did not run without good reason, often fear (running away) or love (running toward). The Calvary/Easter story is about God (like the prodigal son’s father) running toward us, willing to be humiliated on a cross. The reason: love, a love that has been running loose in the world ever since!
  
5. John’s telling of Easter calls attention to our Lent-long question, “What have we witnessed?” Notice the many instances people see but do not see. Mary Magdalene sees the empty tomb, but “sees” a missing body rather than resurrection. Later she sees two angels, but “sees” a possible source of information. Last she sees Jesus, but “sees” a gardener. John and Peter manage to see the same interior of the tomb; Peter “sees” nothing but the literal; John “sees” enough to stir some level of belief. The eyes of faith, implanted by resurrection encounters with God, allow us to see in new ways not previously possible. Angels, empty tombs, gardeners, and “ordinary” days can mean nothing, unless seen through faith’s eyes. What have we witnessed? To whom have we witnessed?

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