

SO NOT WHAT WE EXPECTED
Matthew 28:1-10
Easter Sunday, 2017
Sunrise Presbyterian Church
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We've had lots of conversations this Lent about life. Almost always we have talked about how our lives didn't turn out like we expected. Maybe our spouse died - or left. Perhaps we lost our job - or maybe we just kept working away at a career which bored us. So often we have looked around us and the children have grown up and gone away - here again, what we have seen around us is just not what we expected.

And because we know what it feels like to have failed expectations, we can resonate with the women at the tomb that Easter morning. They, too, had expectations for life. Lately theirs had been wrapped up in the life and ministry of Jesus. They followed him - helped support his ministry - believed in him. They expected him to be with them and to lead them. And now - he was gone. The women were headed to the tomb to do what women have done throughout history - care for the dead - and what they found there was clearly not what they had expected.

Instead, they found the stone rolled away - an angel sitting on a rock and an empty tomb. The angel repeated the words Mary, Joseph and the shepherds had heard before - "Fear Not." *Fear not*, though what they've found is so not what we expected. *Fear not*, though everything around them seemed like total chaos. *Fear not*, what is, but go and tell others what you has happened learned. *Fear not*.

Fear governs so much of our lives. We fear what may happen - we fear what happened or what hasn't happened. We fear the unthinkable violence we often see on the evening news. Day after day we see results from shootings or bombings. We live in the land of large tornadoes - we know they drop out of the sky - we know what could happen and so we do not easily let go of our fear. But, here today, in the brightness of this Easter morning - after conversations admitting that everything did not go the way we planned - here today, is the day to listen to the angel - *Fear not* - Matthew tells us that the two Marys at the tomb did not fully heed the angel's advice - instead, "they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell the disciples." Then they ran into Jesus - they suddenly bumped into him in the garden. They took his feet - they fell down in joy - and this time, it was Jesus who said, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell the others." *Do not be afraid* - Jesus says - Go and tell the others.

In spite of their dashed hopes - in spite of what they expected - in spite of their fears - what they found in Jesus that morning was so much more than they expected. What they found was beyond all that they had hoped for - hope beyond all imagining. What they found was a new expectation - that they could live in the message of Jesus.

That is the good news for us this morning - we live not in the expectations we form for our lives - but we live in the expectation Jesus gives us - the expectation of love and hope. In spite of our countless failures - in spite of all that we have done wrong - Jesus forgives us gives us a new expectation for our lives.

Phillip Newell writes about the cross that "the vertical line joins what is above with what is below - heaven and earth, spirit and matter, the cosmos and the earth. The horizontal line joins what is on one side with what is on the other side - East and West, the masculine and the feminine, the interests of one nation and the life interests of another. At the center of the cross", Newell continues, "the opposites meet. And in the Christian tradition the center of the cross is the place of self-giving. . . . It will be born within us and among us only if we are able to die to our separateness . . . to abandon ourselves to love."ⁱ

Love is simply not what we had expected - but love is what we have found. Let us abandon ourselves to God's love. Let us live into a hope that transcends our wildest expectations - let us join together knowing that failure - death - violence - and hate do not have the last word. Love endures and love prevails. God's love redeems us, transforms us and sets us free. Come, let us run with the women - we need to tell the others about God's most wonderful gift to us. Christ is risen. Christ is risen, indeed. Alleluia! Amen.

ⁱ Phillip Newell, A New Harmony, p. 156.