

Last weekend, we witnessed something special. It's been called the greatest comeback in sports history. Tiger Woods, after being nearly forgotten, won the Masters. He did this after everyone pretty much wrote him off, after serial philandering and domestic shame broke his family into fragments, after missing the cut in garden-variety tournaments, after skipping his beloved Masters three times in what should have been his prime, after dropping to 1,199 in the world rankings, and after all that, Tiger Woods is back!

What's as amazing as Tiger's win, is the reaction far and wide. His victory walk through the gallery was a trek of adoration, with a mass of humanity straining to touch a man who not so long ago felt disgraced, defeated, and even despised. I was struck by the way one news outlet put it, "Tiger Wood's resurrection puts his army of supporters on the march at Augusta."

Maybe you've already guessed where I'm going with this. We're here today celebrating another comeback, another resurrection. If Tiger Woods was down and out, Jesus was more so. If Tiger Woods was forgotten and forsaken, Jesus was more so. If Tiger Woods was despised and disgraced, Jesus was more so. If Tiger Woods was written off as a has-been, more so was Jesus Christ.

I'm guessing most of us here get that. That, of course, is the assumption of the passage I'll read in just a moment from the final chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. In fact, the same words appear twice in our passage, "He has risen." In the original Greek, it's only one word, *ergethe*. One little word turned the world upside down. That's the great announcement of Easter. That's what all Christians, everywhere, have always believed. And even if you don't totally buy into the idea that a dead man could be raised up, you appreciate what this story might mean — that goodness, love, and truth can triumph from suffering and defeat. Perhaps you even see this as a clue that maybe there's something out there beyond death for all of us. Make no mistake, this story is saying that and much more; it's saying Jesus of Nazareth, who was dead for three days, became alive again, and even appeared in the flesh to his disciples.

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were

so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you." So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day. Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:1-20

Easter People are Sent People

What I want to focus on today isn't just the fact that he has risen, but the effect it has on his followers. Go back to that line, "Tiger Wood's resurrection puts his army of supporters on the march at Augusta."

Isn't that an interesting way to put it? Tiger's comeback victory is described as a resurrection that put his people on the march. What I suggest is the resurrection of Jesus, a very unique comeback victory of its own, puts His people on the march as well. Let's call them Easter People.

You can see Easter People on the march all over this story. You see the two Mary's sent by the angel: After inviting them to, "Come and see the place where he lay," he says, "Go quickly and tell his disciples" (v. 6, 7). Then, after the two women are doing just that, they bump into Jesus, and he sends them marching again, "Go, tell my brothers to go to Galilee..." Finally, after the eleven disciples have walked the 100 miles or so from Jerusalem to Galilee, Jesus sends them out, "Go," he says, "and make disciples of all nations..." (v. 19).

It's abundantly clear that Easter people are sent people. I want you to notice a few things about these sent people.

We are sent into the world as broken people

Notice what this says about the kind of the people who are sent. Early Sunday morning, two women went to visit the tomb. These same two women were at the cross when Jesus was crucified (Mark 15:40). They were also there later that day when Joseph placed the body of Jesus in his own tomb, so they know exactly where to go (Matthew 27:61). In another gospel account, we learn they went with spices, kind of like we might bring flowers to a grave today (Luke 24:1).

But who are these two women? They bear the same name, Mary. We don't know a whole lot about "the other Mary," but we do know something about Mary Magdalene. She was a loyal follower of Jesus. Luke wrote, "Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out..." (Lk 8:1-2). Think about that — seven demons! I'm sure one demon could do a lot of damage, but seven? In the language of recovery, her life had become unmanageable. She was a far cry from what we'd call "spiritual wholeness." Yet, she's the first one to hear the news that Jesus had risen, and she was the first one to tell the disciples. It's quite clear that you don't have to be all put together to be sent by Jesus.

But the two Mary's aren't the only ones sent. The eleven disciples were sent to. They had to be shocked when the women told them Jesus wanted to meet up with them in Galilee. Remember, these were the eleven guys who had just failed Discipleship 101. Jesus told them the previous Thursday night, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me" (Matthew 26:31). They were all adamant that would never happen, but they did. When Jesus was arrested that night, they all fled, and then later Peter denied three times that he even knew him. Their best intentions couldn't cut it. They'd all struck out. Then he was crucified, and the game was over. Any hope of redemption, forgiveness, or just another shot at a life of purpose, meaning, and hope was gone.

So, it's these very weak and broken people Jesus sends. Why would he send such people? It's because that's who he came for. He didn't come looking for the brightest and the best, he came seeking the poor in spirit, those who hunger and thirst for

righteousness, those who know they're spiritually sick and need a doctor.

And when those broken people discover he came for them, and he can make them whole, they respond by worshipping him. Look at the two Marys. As they were sent on their mission by the angel, filled with a mixture of fear and joy, they ran right into the risen Jesus.

I love how Jesus just says to them, "Greetings." I find that funny. It's a normal, everyday greeting. It's like you walk into work and say, "Morning," or you run into a friend at Starbucks and say, "Hey." Here, they run into the resurrected Christ, and he just says, "Morning." He didn't say, "Tah-Dah! It's Me!" but just, "Hey."

But look what they did when they recognized him. It says, "They came to him, clasped his feet, and worshipped him" (v. 9). Notice he does have feet; he's not a ghost; he's not an apparition. He has a real body with ten toes! But they bow and worship him. You see, these broken people he sends into the world have made a discovery. He's the King of kings and Lord of lords, and he's worthy of our worship.

We see the same thing later when the disciples met Jesus in Galilee. The Bible says, "When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted" (v. 17). Look how honest Matthew is in this passage. Remember, he was there. He was not covering up their flaws and shortcomings. Yes, they worshipped him, but some doubted — Another reminder God uses flawed people such as bipolar disciples who are a mixture of worship and doubt.

Maybe you came here today with both of those things on your mind — you do want to worship him, but you have doubts. That's okay. He's good with that. You're just the kind of person he sends!

We are sent into the world as marginalized people

Something else I notice in this story is he sends his Easter People into a world not always friendly to the announcement that he has risen. You might say Easter People are marginalized people.

Right in the heart of this story we see the dark side at work. It's a countermovement away from the reality of the resurrection. As the women ran to tell the good news to the disciples, the religious leaders received a report from the guards they placed at the tomb. No doubt the guards told them all about the earthquake, how the stone rolled away, perhaps even how an angel came down like a flash of lightning and sat on it.

But the religious leaders were blind to the truth of what happened. They didn't cross-examine the guards. They didn't even ask, "What did you see? How did the stone get rolled back?" No, they just paid the guards off to say they fell asleep, and while sleeping, his disciples stole the body.

Once again, money plays a dark role in the story. They'd paid Judas money to share what he knew. Then they paid the guards

money not to share what they knew. But, when you think about it, it really doesn't make any sense: How would the guards know who stole the body if they were asleep? And if there were an earthquake, wouldn't at least one guard have woken up?

But we shouldn't be surprised. Ever since that day, generations of skeptics have tried to find ways to explain away the resurrection of Jesus. Western culture and even the American Constitution is built on the philosophy of the Enlightenment. Its goal was to do away with superstitions and replace them with rational and enlightened views, freeing people from intellectual and political tyranny. It's brought many wonderful things to us like modern medicine and democracy. But it has also brought a worldview that has no room for a risen Savior or hope of a new creation. Enlightenment thinking states resurrecting someone back to life isn't scientifically possible or historically plausible. About 100 billion people have lived and died before us, and not one of them has returned to life. The resurrection would be a one in a hundred billion event — beyond miraculous.

What would you say to that? I'd say, well, of course! Even people in Matthew's day knew dead people don't come back to life. But, if there is a God, and he did send his Son, couldn't he have done something extraordinary? You see, we believe something new and different happened with Jesus, something that tore a hole in normal history. The God who made the world sent His Son on a rescue operation. His ultimate goal was to remake the world and the people in it. The resurrection was the launching point of that project.

But that news is threatening, especially to those who have a lot to lose, like the religious leaders in this story. There are those who've invested everything in this world, and if this world is being turned upside down, that's threatening. Easter People need to understand they'll be marginalized people; people sent into a world that will not take kindly to their message.

We are sent into the world as purposeful people

But Easter People are undaunted because they have a compelling purpose. That purpose becomes crystal clear when the eleven disciples arrive in Galilee. We're not exactly sure why Jesus arranged this meet-up in Galilee. He could have just said the same thing to them in Jerusalem. But for some reason he wanted them to do it in Galilee. Maybe it was because Galilee was known as "Galilee of the Gentiles." Since Jesus was sending them out to reach not just Jews but all the ethnicities of the world, it makes sense he'd do that where there were so many Gentiles.

Notice also he met them on a mountain. We don't know what mountain but it was likely the same mountain where he gave the Sermon on the Mount, and where he was transfigured before Peter, James, and John. That mountain was a symbol of authority, like when Moses received the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai. Jesus emphasized that right here. He said, "All

authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me..." That's quite a claim, especially to a pluralistic society like our own! No one is allowed to say that today, but he said it.

But what I want you to see here is Jesus sent his disciples out with a purpose; a purpose Easter People have today. We know how important this is because it's the last thing Matthew records in his Gospel. You always want to end on a high note. It's taken a long time to get through this Gospel, and so don't miss the last thing he wrote!

Here, we get our purpose, our marching orders — to make disciples of all nations. That's what we've been sent to do. By the way, that isn't just referring to nations like America and Afghanistan, but rather specific groups with a unifying ethnic identity consisting of language, religion, and culture. These are called people groups. For example, India is one nation with over 450 people groups. Jesus sends us to reach them all.

But I don't want to focus on that because it's too overwhelming. Let's talk instead about what this means in your everyday life. What's a disciple? A disciple is a learner, an apprentice, or a student. To make disciples is to connect a person intimately to Jesus. There are no shortcuts or formulas for this. To build that kind of relationship with Jesus takes time. Today, if someone wants to become a journeyman electrician, it takes years of on the job training as an apprentice. Making disciples is no less of a process.

Jesus said it starts with baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Baptism symbolized their initiation into the Kingdom of God. For people to be baptized, they must first hear the Gospel and then believe it. The Bible said when that happened, they were "rescued...from the dominion of darkness and brought...into the kingdom of the Son he loves..." (Col. 1:13). Some of us are cultivating relationships right now with a desire to see a friend take that step.

But it doesn't just end there. Jesus said making disciples also meant teaching them to "obey everything I have commanded you." A disciple is someone who's learning to obey the words of Jesus. We're all a work in progress, but a disciple has surrendered control of his life and said, "Whatever Jesus says, I'll do." To make disciples who follow Jesus in everything takes time. You can't do it in a hurry. It means hands-on, face-to-face encounters. It means walking with people who take three steps forward and two steps back. It means overcoming our own feelings of inadequacy. Some of you are parents. Parents are called to make disciples of their children. You know how personal and sometimes how painful that can be.

We are sent into the world as hopeful people.

But notice the very the last thing Jesus said here. As he was sending them out to make disciples, he said, "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

This brings us back to a central theme in this Gospel. There are two bookends to Matthew: Back in chapter 1:23 we read, "They will call him Immanuel" (which means 'God with us')." And then, here, at the very end, "Surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

This tells me, we're hopeful people. We're hopeful because Jesus promises to be with us always. That word always means "the whole of every day." I like that because when I think of following Jesus and making disciples for my whole life, I wonder if I can do that. What if I get a debilitating illness? Or what if my wife or one of my kids were to die? Will I still follow Jesus through the "what ifs?" But if I just know he's with me the whole of this day, and the next day, and the next day, I can do that.

We are especially hopeful people because of those last seven words, "to the very end of the age." This is a reminder that we live in an age in which not all is right. That's so much pain, so much injustice, and so much evil. Jesus may have "all authority in heaven and on earth," but not everyone lives under his authority. But a day is coming when this age will end, and a new one will begin. It's then his authority and reign will be made complete. And the resurrection is the first sign that it is possible; it's the launch of this new age; the first real sign that a whole new world is opening up before us.

I heard a story about an inmate at San Quentin prison who decided he'd had enough. After dreaming of freedom, he devised a plan to break out. He'd hide in a dirty laundry bin, and an unsuspecting truck driver would grab the bin with the convict stuffed under wet towels and dirty uniforms. The laundry company would drive him right through the prison gates into freedom.

There was only one problem with the plan: the laundry trucks never left the property; they just shuttled between the prison buildings. After a nice, smelly ride around the prison grounds, he just went back to his jail cell and continued his sentence.

In some ways, this is a parable for our fallen world apart from Christ. We long for a better life. We dream about a world filled with justice, hope and freedom. But we're like the inmate who keeps riding around the prison yard. The truck is moving around the buildings, but we never actually leave the grounds. We're all stuck in the same system. So even when prison life seems bearable and even safe and comfortable, deep down we know this isn't our home. We were made for freedom. Occasionally something tantalizes us from beyond the prison walls — the smell of the ocean, the shouts of children playing, or an eagle soaring

overhead — and it causes a longing for freedom to grow within us until we realize we'll never get out of here alive.

But what if someone broke out of the prison? What if rather than just ride around and around in a laundry truck, someone escaped? And what if he not only escaped but returned to the prison to free us? He might say something like, "I beat the system and broke out. There really is a place where the sea roars, children play, and eagles soar. There's a way out. You have to follow me. But I'm going to leave you here a little while longer so you can tell others about me and show them there's something more out there."

This is what happened in the resurrection and this is why, as sent people, we have hope. Jesus became "God with us" and entered our prison. He spoke of life beyond these prison walls, a kingdom of love, justice, and joy. He didn't just talk about it but demonstrated it by healing the sick, loving the unlovely, and casting out demons.

But then he died, and everyone thought it was over. The crucifixion seemed to say, "Everything is broken. No one escapes this place." But with the resurrection, everything changed. Jesus said to his disciples and to us, "Don't be afraid. There's a new life beyond these prison walls of sin, death, and evil. I know the way out. Tell that to everyone you can, and show them what life in that new world is like."

All of that hinges on three simple words — HE HAS RISEN! Maybe today is for you the day to really believe that for the very first time. To come with your fears and your doubts and to believe He has risen and he will show you the way out.

Those who believe that are Easter People, and Easter People are sent people. As a follower of the risen Jesus, you've been sent! You've been sent even in your brokenness, even as a mixture of worship and doubt. You've been sent into a world that's dark and will be threatened by you and your message. You've been sent with a clear purpose to make disciples. And you've been sent as hopeful people because he's with you the whole of every day, right up to the end of this age and the glorious beginning of the new one.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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