

Message: “Christ the Game Changer”, presented by Reverend Kristen Lowe on Easter 04-16-2017 at Crossroads United Methodist Church, Waunakee, WI.

It was still dark out. The sun hadn't quite risen. Grief swept over the earth and the hearts of Jesus' followers were crushed. They didn't know, they couldn't see what God was doing behind the scenes.

Matthew 28: 1-15

After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’

This is my message for you.” So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of 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 they were going, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests everything that had happened. After the priests had assembled with the elders, they devised a plan to give a large sum of money to the soldiers, telling them, “You must say, ‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ If this comes to the governor’s ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story is still told among the Jews to this day.

Our lives are forever changed! May the Good news reignite our hearts to God's providence in our lives. Amen!

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I grew up in a house where we played a lot of games. My mom and I played a lot of kings in the corner. We also played Aggravation, Chinese checkers, Monopoly... My daughter happens to like Trouble.

Sometimes our games get pretty intense.

On occasion, we switch the rules, just for fun. It's like playing a whole new game. Sometimes, just when one of us is about to lose, we're given an extra life. When you switch the rules... everything changes!

Sometimes we don't change the rules... but my daughter decides... on her own... that new rules need to be implemented if she is not winning.

When this happens, swift and decisive measures must be taken.



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At the beginning of time, God created the world.



And everything was... good, holy, pure. We had everything we needed! We didn't need to look for more. God supplied abundantly what we needed.

There were a couple of rules. He said, “Don't touch the bad stuff or else you'll lose your holy spark that allows you to live in paradise in my presence. Don't touch the bad stuff or you'll invite trouble.... You'll invite death and decay.”

What did we do? What was the result?

I used to walk to kindergarten with the neighbor boys. One day it had rained really hard overnight and there were puddles everywhere. My mom told me to stay out of the mud. But on the way to school, the neighbor boys dared me. I wasn't about to look wimpy in front of a couple of boys. I did what any self-respecting five-year-old would do. I invited trouble.

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I realized as soon as I did it that it was the wrong choice. But there was no going back. I couldn't undo what was done. I was stuck in wet shoes all day – paying the price for my choices. What I wouldn't have given to have Jesus appear in the doorway with a pair of warm, dry, comfortable shoes!

Our Gospel reading begins on that first Easter morning.

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary make their way to the tomb of Jesus.

What do they expect to find?

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I suppose they expect what you and I would expect if we went to visit the grave of a friend: ...the grave, the tomb, would look like most graves or tombs.

It would be undisturbed.

You certainly would not expect your friend or loved one to be gone!

And yet that is exactly what the two Marys encounter!

This event is highly dramatic in Matthew's telling of the story.

There is a great earthquake, which shakes up their perspective and probably everything else in the surrounding area.

And then an angel of the Lord appears, and remarkably this single angel rolls back the stone of the grave and then sits on it.

There the angel, all dazzling and supernatural, looks at them!

Can you imagine how shocking it would be for these two women to witness all of this?

It is incomprehensible, really.

The guards' behavior tells us how disarming it was.

They panic to the point that they pass out.

But the women, the women keep it together.

The angel, then, speaks to them:

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“Do not be afraid; ...for I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified... He is not here, ...for he has been raised from the dead, ...Come and see the place where he lay.” (Bible)

The Tomb is empty. He is risen!

They have come to a place of death yet there they found life!

This is a game-changer. This is a life altering encounter for the two Marys.

The fact that Jesus is risen completely changes their world. Not even death could defeat their Lord. He is risen. Though they remain afraid and probably unsure about what this all means for them, they know that nothing, nothing will ever be the same.

Then, the angel commands them to go quickly. Go quickly and tell the disciples that Jesus is risen. That Jesus is no longer dead.

The Angel tells them that Jesus is going ahead of them to Galilee. Go and see him there.

And so they respond.

They Immediately leave the tomb, filled with fear and great joy and ran to tell his disciples.

This was clearly a very emotional encounter for them. They were surely overwhelmed with emotions.

The women are afraid, and yet filled with great joy.

Then, suddenly, Jesus meets them on the road and greets them. Can you imagine?

They fall to their hands and knees! They can't believe it! They immediately worship him. They realize that he is the Messiah!

He is risen bodily from the dead.

Not only have the women witnessed the empty tomb, the earthquake and the stone being rolled away by an angelic being, but now they have experienced personally the risen Jesus for themselves.

For them, it is completely clear. He is Risen. Jesus is risen. What is going on here?!?! The rule of death no longer applies? Jesus has come along and changed the rules. The laws that governed the universe have been completely upheaved when God himself died in human form. You see, God cannot die, but humans can. So he suffered in his humanity, paying a dear price for our rescue from this dreaded curse. And THAT changes everything!

Then the Lord says to two women, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

Go and tell, Jesus commands them to go and tell. To share the Good News!

Jesus is clear, he wants all to know the Good News: he is risen and death has been conquered.

Beloved. This Resurrection, this conquering of death is not just for Jesus, but for every one who accepts, who proclaims Jesus as their Savior and as their Lord.

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So the women go and tell, and those who heard go and tell, and those that they share the news with in turn go and tell.

And in this way, the message of Christ's resurrection is passed down throughout the ages, through the generations, to you and to me this very day.

We have been given Good News and we are to go and tell, to share the Good News.

He is risen!

Can we fully comprehend what has changed? We aren't bound by this world anymore! Once we embrace the gift that has been given us, everything changes! Jesus is a game changer!

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Our societal norms lay out a pretty significant course of rules. We understand how life works. But Jesus comes along and changes the rules, which means our lives look totally different. We can experience joy in the midst of pain. We have hope that rises above all challenges. We have the peace that passes all understanding.

And if the ending of the game is completely different, then our strategy needs to change! We get to live for real! We get to experience life after this life. In fact, compared to what we're living now, this is just a taste of paradise with God!

Because Jesus has changed the game, we need to think about what our next move is.

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Radiating light and hope and beauty into a broken world means we're playing with a broken game board. But because we belong to Christ, we have power through Him to change the rules.

We get to be light in the darkness, hope for the hopeless, action instead of just words, justice for the oppressed.

Because the tomb was empty, the game has changed.