

Faith Mennonite Church  
April 24, 2011 ~ Easter  
“Turn to Jesus, go with the Spirit”  
Joetta Schlabach

**From fear to a whole new world**  
*Acts 10: 34-43; Matthew 28:1-10; 16-20*

All their dreams were dashed. Their leader, their beloved teacher, the one for whom they had thrown in their lot, believing that he was ushering in a new age, was dead. How many times had he said, “the kingdom is here, the kingdom is within you and among you”? Yet how could this be if he were dead, nailed to a cross? It was all so confusing.

The disciples were numb and afraid. The men huddled together, behind locked doors. A couple women ventured out early in the morning, not because they were feeling any differently or somehow had more faith, but because women’s work didn’t end when someone died. They led the vigilant wailing; they kept watch at the grave. They could also move around with greater invisibility, because women were always out first thing in the morning, carrying water or seeking provisions. They wouldn’t call attention to themselves.

The earth had quaked two days before at the moment that Jesus died. And now as the Marys approached the tomb, the earth quaked again. While the first quake had signaled an end, this new quake opened up a whole new reality: “Don’t be afraid,” said the angel who appeared and rolled back the stone. “Jesus, isn’t here; he’s been raised—he’s alive!—and he’s heading for Galilee. Go tell his disciples to meet him there.”

Galilee! Now that was familiar territory! That was where the disciples, the men and the women, were from. That was where Jesus had preached and healed. The women may not have comprehended what was happening, but it wasn’t hard to follow an order to go to Galilee. Any chance to get out of Jerusalem—the place of betrayal, of confrontation, of a sham trial, and then the crucifixion—was a welcome one. The men wouldn’t argue with this, even if they might have a hard time believing that Jesus was alive.

Before the women could get back to the disciples, Jesus met them on the road. As if he were anticipating the confusion they must have been feeling, he repeated the words of the angel, “Do not be afraid.” They fell to the ground and worshipped him, then continued their mission to alert the disciples to go to Galilee.

The Gospel of Matthew comes to a rapid conclusion after this scene. The disciples go to Galilee and meet Jesus on a mountain. Some of them believe and some doubt. Jesus commissions them to go and make disciples of all the nations. And he leaves them with a promise. His concluding words, and the final words of the Gospel, are: “Remember, I am with you to the end of the age.”

Matthew’s resurrection account is a prototype for our own encounter with the living Christ. We walk in fear and uncertainty, troubled by the events that swirl around us, anxious about what is happening to our planet, disillusioned by conflicts that divide religious communities, numbed by so much suffering in the world. Then, a friend, or a parent or family member, or sometimes someone we hardly know, tells us that Jesus has come near and has brought peace and hope into their life. And what’s more, Jesus has called them to live in a community that celebrates and shares that peace and that hope, where people can find release from their fears and the resentments they carry, where they can join in binding up the wounds of others.

We feel drawn in, we listen and follow, and then one day we realize that we're not just depending on the word and testimony of another—the angel in our midst. We are feeling drawn by the very Spirit of Jesus. We hear Jesus' voice saying "Do not be afraid," and we fall down and worship. Then Jesus says to each of us, even in those moments when we doubt, when we don't fully understand, "Go and make disciples. Invite others to this life you have found. And remember, I am with you always."

Jesus lived in finite time. Jesus died in finite time. But when God raised Jesus from the dead, he was released from time and place to be with us in every time and in every place. This same resurrection releases us to claim the faith of a movement that began over 2000 years ago. It releases us to welcome as our family people who may be very different from us. It releases us to claim our full humanity as we allow the Spirit of the risen Christ to shape us into full citizens of the reign of God.

Jesus called the disciples back to Galilee, the familiar place, one last time. But he didn't call them to stay there. Instead, he sent them out, to every nation, to the ends of the earth. For some that would mean returning to Jerusalem, the place of fear and of death, to live in trust and hope. For others it meant crossing ethnic and cultural distances that they had never imagined. Peter, the rough Galilean fisherman with an indelible memory of how the Roman soldiers had killed Jesus, answered the call of the Spirit to go to the home of a Roman centurion, Cornelius, and share the resurrection hope with that household.

Brothers and sisters, the message of the resurrection is that God's love is stronger than death. This Jesus, whom God raised to life, continues to come to us, and continues to say "do not be afraid." And the Spirit continues to say, "Go and make disciples, invite others to this life that you have been given. And remember, I am with you to the end of the age."

Like Peter, Tyler & Kristi Zabriskie and their family have been taken to places they hardly expected...forgotten communities of native peoples in this country, traumatized communities in Cambodia, joyful communities in the Congo and in Pasadena, and now Minnesota, where they have been initiated with a long, hard winter. Today we are welcoming them into membership in our congregation. They are transferring their membership from Pasadena Mennonite Church. Today is a formality, for they joined the life of our community in an active way since their arrival last June.