

“HE IS GOING AHEAD OF YOU”

Thomas Robinson, *Easter*, April 20, 2014

MATTHEW 28:1-10, 16-20 [Cf. Mk 16; Lk 24; Jn 20-21]

¹ Now after the **Sabbath**, toward the dawn of the **first day of the week**, **Mary Magdalene** and the other **Mary** went to see the tomb.

² And behold, there was a great **earthquake**, for an **angel of the Lord** descended from heaven and came and **rolled back the stone** and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like **lightning**, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴ And for fear of him the **guards trembled** and became like dead men.

⁵ But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know **that you seek Jesus** who was **crucified**. ⁶ **He is not here, for he has risen**, as he said. Come, **see the place** where he lay. ⁷ Then **go quickly** and **tell his disciples** that he has **risen from the dead**, and behold, he is **going ahead of you to Galilee**; there **you will see him**. See, I have told you.”

⁸ So they departed quickly from the tomb with **fear and great joy**, and **ran** to tell his disciples.

⁹ And behold, **Jesus met them** and said, “**Greetings!**” And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, “**Do not be afraid**; go and tell my brothers to **go to Galilee**, and there they will see me.” ...

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples **went to Galilee**, to the **mountain** to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ And when they saw him they **worshiped him**, but **some doubted**.

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them,

“**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.**

¹⁹ **Go** therefore and **make disciples** of all nations,

baptizing them in the name of the **Father** and of the **Son** and of the **Holy Spirit**,

²⁰ **teaching them** to keep **all that I have commanded you.**

And behold, **I am with you always, to the end of the age.**”

MATTHEW 1:23

²³ “*Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name **Immanuel**” (which means, **God with us**). [Isa. 7:14]*

MATTHEW 4:8-9

⁸ Again, the accuser took him to a very high mountain and showed him **all the kingdoms of the world and their glory**. ⁹ And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.”

MATTHEW 6:9-10

⁹ Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰ **Your kingdom come**, your will be done, **on earth as it is in heaven....**”

1 CORINTHIANS 15:20-26

²⁰ But in fact **Christ has been raised from the dead**, the **firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep**.

²¹ For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also **in Christ shall all be made alive**. ²³ But each in his own order: **Christ the firstfruits**, then **at his presence (parousia) those who belong to Christ**.

²⁴ Then comes **the end**, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. ²⁵ **For he must reign** until he has put **all his enemies under his feet**.

²⁶ The **last enemy to be destroyed is death**.

ROMANS 8:9-11

⁹ You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the **Spirit of God dwells in you**. Anyone who does not have **the Spirit of Christ** does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if **Christ is in you**, although the body is dead because of sin, **the Spirit is life** because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who **raised Jesus from the dead** dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also **give life to your mortal bodies** through his **Spirit** who dwells in you.

“I Know It Sounds Strange, But ...”

We come to the great climax of Matthew’s Gospel. Many great events from the Sermon on the Mount to Crucifixion and all they meant would be unknown without the Resurrection. Mt shows us connections back to the beginning: Immanuel/God with us; a promise of power. The whole Gospel lives not as events of long ago, but as word and work of a Living Jesus. But we live in a skeptical age, and isn’t it all just too impossible? Yes, it’s impossible in the normal course of events, but yes, it happened! A radically new event. That’s the point! Jesus’ followers did not expect his resurrection. In the distant future, perhaps, but not now. The women go to see the tomb, not resurrection, not defeat of death. Beyond our imagination! Mt describes the earthquake and angel with great drama – to reveal a tomb already empty. The women are commissioned as the first witnesses to the other absent disciples. The accounts have the diversity and surprised quality of personal narratives: “... *that’s what I saw!*”

“He is Going Ahead of You”

Each Gospel has its own emphasis. Mt wants to show the disciples following Jesus as he goes before them. Jesus appears to the women and sends them to “my brothers” – ending fear. Jesus goes ahead of the disciples (and us) throughout the Gospel, leading, calling, challenging, never coercing. That pattern continues. The resurrection itself is the ultimate “going ahead.” In it, Jesus leaps ahead to the fulfillment of God’s promise of life / renewal for all his people. By embodying that future reality, Jesus reveals the direction, purpose, meaning of all of life. The resurrection is the emphatic assertion that life is not random or meaningless, no matter how much evil humans may bring into it. The physical world is God’s creation. As he created it, so he will recreate and renew it. The entirety of our existence matters, body and spirit.

Seeking and Living in the Kingdom of God

Jesus urged his followers to seek God’s kingdom. Now he identifies it: “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*” Here is the opening of a new age. All the anticipations of God’s rule through the ages reach a new realization in Jesus’ Cross and Resurrection. Here begins a new stage in God uniting his created earth with his own reality of “heaven.” The heart and rule of God are seen in Jesus’ teaching, signs, parables, service, and ultimately in his cross, God’s own power of love. They now live in Jesus as king. The kingdom of God lives. People wanted Jesus to come with armies and destruction. Like we would. He comes with a cross and resurrection. Like leaven or a mustard seed or a pearl. We expected a bigger explosion. But the cross and resurrection are vastly more powerful – new life, new world.

The Great Story: Learn ... Plunge ... Learn ... Live

A central focus of this kingdom is humans. As God had created them to be his image and representatives in caring for and governing his world, Jesus commissions faulty(!) disciples in this work of renewal. They go to all nations (Gentiles!, not just the house of Israel), since God is God of all peoples and renews his world by renewing minds, learning: being disciples. Jesus calls each person to take the plunge of commitment–baptism–starting a real journey with God, as Jesus had. In that journey we learn the One God in his depth and richness, a life of love of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each engaging a special, powerful part of our relationship with God. By the Spirit we become more and more an opening of union of heaven & earth. We learn and teach and learn all that Jesus taught. His Sermon on the Mount is a description of life in this kingdom. We are all just beginners, learning, living by his promises of maturity. His kingdom is *His* work. We participate actively, building, creating, serving, learning, because he is always present, working with us and in us. We doubt, we learn, we plunge, we grow.