

## **4-16-17 Easter "Whole Lotta Shakin Goin' On" A Reflection on Matthew 28:1-18 by Mark Arbisi, Christ Church, KBK**

Two thousand years out from the scene just visited in Matthew's Gospel, one thing is obvious. We continue to have an affinity for the finality of death. As articulated by a colleague in ministry, it remains a given, "the only place springtime happens is on the grave, not in them" (B. B. Taylor). So it is natural for us, and for the two Mary's in the story, and for all the male disciples who are gone missing from the story, to stumble and bumble around some on Easter morning—what could perhaps be called the ultimate Easter egg hunt. After all, not only were we not eyewitnesses, there were no eyewitnesses. All that Easter is and all that Easter offers the world is received after the fact, kinda like an inheritance.

A miracle, among countless miracles that surround Easter is our perennial returning to the heaviness of a predawn graveyard to again experience as best as we're able what we can of this Resurrection thing. Which is a true miracle indeed, as we surely arrive grappling with any number of questions: What is it? What's it mean to me? Is it an historical narrative or more a theological revelation? Or both? And if both, how can that be? To be sure, as someone has said, "the Resurrection is something that both sounds right and sounds nonsensical [something like this it's suggested]:

"The elephant is a bonnie bird.

It flits from bough to bough.

It makes its nest in a rhubarb tree

and whistles like a cow."

Yet here we are once again, gathered together on Easter morning despite the fact that most Easter worshipers are mostly still stumbling, mostly still bumbling; as if perhaps stumbling and bumbling is the most natural approach to Easter, even all these many years later; as if the sun has not broken the horizon when in fact God obliterated that horizon most effectively some time ago and all one needs do is gaze in the right direction. Or in other words, if you're still not clear who this Jesus is and what this Jesus is all about...you're in luck. Today is your day because today is Easter Day and Easter Day is all about you and me and everyone going to the Garden alone but leaving in excellent company. So, whoever you are and wherever you are on life's journey, you're in the right place.

If you've noticed my sermon titled you may have made the connection I made, which begins with a confession. Yes, I did borrow from a song title made famous by Jerry Lee Lewis of Rock 'n Roll fame, and not just a title but as the theme for all that follows. It struck me last week while reading for the

umpteenth million time of Jesus' Triumphal Entry that there was a *whole lotta shakin goin' on*; and then that same shakin started shakin again, or never stopped shakin, I'm not sure which, as I reflected on our Easter narrative from Matthew; and even then the shakin didn't stop. The more I noticed this phenomenon the more shakin there was *goin' on* on the pages of my Bible to notice, and of course, in noticing I got excited. Which is why I'm now excited to tell you about it.

It seems Jesus was something of a Rock 'n Roller; at least that is how he frequently comes off, which pretty much began at day one when we're told about the Wise Men inquiring of King Herod, and how the King and all of Jerusalem with him started shakin at the news of Jesus' birth. As mentioned, when Jesus entered into Jerusalem many years later Matthew tells us that "All the city was shakin." And then on Good Friday when Jesus breathed his last, things really got all shakin up, so much so the curtain separating the holy of hollies from us ordinary folks was ripped in two, top to bottom—symbolizing, as you know, our free access to God--but things were just getting going. The earth shook, the rocks split apart, even the slabs over the graves shook open, enabling many of the saints to be raised—a sort of prequel to Easter just a few days hence.

And in our Easter narrative shared moments ago, yes once again, now not at all the least bit surprisingly, as the Mary's arrive at the empty tomb they are met with "a great earthquake." Yes, not just your ordinary 3.2 on the Richter Scale earthquake but a "great" one, think a full blown 10, which is really shakin. And then there is the rather intriguing little detail regarding the angel rolling back the stone, which surely shook things up at least a little, as we're not talkin' a pebble here. And all through this it turns out that the original word used, *Seio* (from which we get the word seismic BTW) means more than merely the moving of the ground under our feet, it also includes a sense of shock and awe or even concussion, which of course are things we attribute to human experience not the movement of tectonic plates; and as it is certainly an excellent description of what Mary and the other Mary experienced on that first day of the week.

So, see what I mean...there is no avoiding the obvious, concerning the life, death and resurrection of our Jesus, there is simply a *whole lotta shakin goin' on*! It's like, everywhere he goes God tosses in an earthquake or two so we can't possibly miss the significance of it all. It's like, O-M-G, how *did* we ever miss that? It's like, by golly, this Jesus of ours is all about shaking the cobwebs out from just about everywhere, between the Temple pillars, between all that is dead and buried, between what was and what is happening, between our questions and our answers, between our ears. I'd say especially between our ears.

And you know what else, though Easter may always be something people approach stumbling and bumbling over, a *whole lot of shakin goin' on* is something we can each fully relate to. I mean, that's life isn't it? Like in spades. Right? Like especially these days. I mean name something that isn't being shakin these days? Military maneuvering and expenditures—shakin! Border security—shakin! Funding for Public Schools—shakin! Health care, affordable and otherwise—shakin! Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security—shakin! Aliens and immigrants and refugees—shakin! Reproductive rights—shakin! You name it it's shakin! God knows there is a *whole lotta shakin goin' on*, far more I confess than I'd personally prefer. I confess too that I actually have a fondness for stable ground.

So, we learn this Easter that Jerry Lee Lewis and God have much in common. Now regardless of how we feel about rock 'n roll and earthquakes there is an obvious uptick here. And naturally that is precisely the point our Gospel is making: shakin is clear evidence of the release and the manifestation of the power of God loose in the world! And this is after all, rather huge. Wouldn't you say? That is after all what faith is, excuse the pun, ground in—faith is based and blossoms upon what evidence our eyes are blessed to behold of the release of and the manifestation of the power of God. Indeed, is that not entirely what our Resurrection-based faith is grounded in—the release and manifestation of the power of God? It is indeed.

Now some know exactly how that shakin feelin' compels deeper, richer, fuller faith; how it startles us from complacency into restlessness; how it sends you out each week energized to shake the world much like one might shake a tree to produce an abundance of fresh fruit all around your feet. Friends, it's that shakin feeling that fills the world with love, that produces selfless expressions of sincerity and generosity for neighbor, for stranger, for enemy—all those legions Christ sends us out to embrace with expressions of true hospitality and inclusivity. It's this shakin feeling that also sends us into Church each **Sunday** morning, so as to insure our spiritual tanks never run empty, where we become reenergized and all the more ready and eager to shake anew, shake the very ground under the tombs of all that is lifeless and lackluster in the everyday of the world around us. As we all know, the saddest thing to witness is no shakin goin' on in the hearts and imaginations, the spirits and the lives of those who actually believe life without any shakin, without God's animating Spirit in force is a preferable life.

Now I don't know if all this Godly shakin stuff is in any way a revelation to you this Easter, or if on the other hand it is old hat and self-evident, like what your faith has always and a day been turned into. At the cost of diminishing my Easter reflection, I truly hope it is the latter. As of course,

there ain't nothin' new about God's shakin, nor nothin' new about people of good faith drawing power and abundant life from it.

There happens to be a village in Maine called Sabbathday Lake where you will find a unique faith community who were originally known as the "shakin Quakers" and who came to simply be known as the Shakers. There is much that is unique about their expression of our Christian faith—their utterly communal and intentionally unadorned lifestyle, their 18<sup>th</sup> century recognition of the equity of the sexes, their celibacy—and yes, as their name suggests, their unique recognition of and embrace of the manifestation of the power of God let loose in the world. Read that, shakin; shakin which they channeled into a ritual dance that was incorporated into their worship. Yes, at one time, there was indeed a *whole lotta shakin goin' on* during their services. And O-M-G, what fun it would be. Imagine feeling your faith all the way down in your toes. And yes, they actually wore special dancing shoes to worship.

Friends, it is Easter. Everything is shakin just as God wills, precisely as is most advantageous to us and to our faith-formation. The very announcement that "he lives" is sufficient to shake our bones. Even without our dancing shoes on we understand that dancing accompanies celebrations, and celebration accompanies worship, and worship each and every first day of the week celebrates the first Easter of them all; so each and every Sunday this ground shakes just for us. Each and every Sunday we figuratively dance in recognition of the power of God let loose that even death and stones cannot contain.

So there you have it. Never stop shakin for God. Each and every day—shake it out, shake it all out! Because, "He is Risen..."

Amen