Sermon copyright © 2011 by Pastor Erik Kindem, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. All rights reserved.

Easter 1A
Peace, Seattle
April 24, 2011 epk
Matthew 28

RESURRECTION TRAJECTORY

Empires crave it, dictators covet it; governments and institutions strive for it.
The enemies of Jesus insisted upon it. Security.

Yet it is insecurity that has characterized so much of the year 2011 so far.
First Tunisia, then Egypt, now Libya. Revolution is overtaking the Arab world.
Who's next? Yemen…Syria…Jordan? And where will it end? We wonder.

Then there's Japan, wholly insecure; still reeling in the aftermath of the earthquake that struck five weeks ago; still trying to find firm footing.

And finally, there's us, the U.S. of A.; embroiled in an endlessly looping debate about debt ceilings and taxes while we grope for an economic security that still eludes us.

_____

THE ROMANS—now they had security down pat.
Those who dared go public in their opposition to Empire were met with brutal force:
public execution by crucifixion…that way everyone knew where they stood.

St. Matthew tells us that even though Jesus is dead, the community he left behind still presents some sort of security threat in the eyes of those who opposed him.

They needn't have worried, of course. Jesus' inner circle all abandoned or denied him when he was arrested. Only a few faithful women, in Matthew's account, even witnessed the crucifixion.

Nonetheless, the leaders who demanded his death go to Pilate demanding that extra security measures be taken, and so an extra security detail is provided—in the Roman way:
Post two guards, even three; if one falls asleep you've got things covered.

It seems like overkill to me! I mean, really—HOW MANY SOLDIERS DOES IT TAKE TO GUARD A DEAD MAN?! After 24 hours of quiet, I can see them, that second night, drawing straws to see who gets to take the first nap.

_____

But something, our gospel tells us, **something happened** toward morning that changed everything.
The securely sealed and securely guarded tomb was not secure enough!

_____

What language can we borrow to describe what happened on Easter morning?

In the opening chapters of his gospel, Matthew uses the language of constellations and supernovas—of dreams sprung from unconscious realms – to tell the story of Jesus' birth.

The human sphere alone is too small a palette for painting the story of God's birth among us!
The stars themselves, and those who discern them, must be enlisted to tell the story.

Sermon copyright © 2011 by Pastor Erik Kindem, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. All rights reserved.

What other language is there for telling how the Creator of the Universe, the Infinite, the Invisible, became finite, visible, vulnerable; trading the security of divinity for this violent, cruel world in order to be Immanuel—God with us?

So Matthew, in the final chapter of his story of God-with-us, is compelled to go there again… to tell us how the earth itself—in its trembling, convulsing, shaking—participates in the resurrection story.

- **THE EARTH SHAKES**, and human empires are dislodged;
- **THE EARTH SHAKES**, and weapons fall;
- **THE EARTH SHAKES**, and the boundary between death and life is broken.

The earth quakes as God's Herald rolls the stone away and then plops down on top of it with a grin on his face and a glint in his eye…
…And the FEAR—the fear with which Rome ruled the world is turned back on itself, paralyzing the soldiers and rendering their armaments utterly useless.

THE EARTH QUAKES AND THE WORLD IS CHANGED…

We've seen in our own time an earthquake's destructive potential: the cities it leveled, the tsunami it spawned, the nuclear crises it hastened. From Japan those vibrations ripple out even now, with consequences that have and will affect the lives and livelihoods of individuals, communities, industries & economies for years to come…

Now, turn that description of devastation completely upside down, on its head, turn what was DEstruction into CONstruction, turn what was LOSS into TRIUMPH, what was DEFEAT into VICTORY, and we begin to understand what this Easter gospel is telling us:
That the power which brought life into existence on the first day of creation, has swept into the tomb on this eighth day, raising him who was crucified to resurrected life!

DO NOT BE AFRAID—YOU ARE LOOKING FOR JESUS—BUT HE IS NOT HERE, FOR HE HAS BEEN RAISED!

Listen closely now…for Matthew's whole story to this point is prelude to what happens after the angel's proclamation.

The women, filled with fear and great joy, are entrusted with a message, are commissioned to tell the others, **"Christ goes ahead of you to Galilee." What is Matthew telling us?**

The words, HE IS NOT HERE, HE HAS BEEN RAISED, are designed to get us moving, to take us somewhere! Resurrection isn't about staying in the empty graveyard; resurrection has a trajectory; resurrection has a mission, and that mission begins in Galilee.

Why Galilee? It's the place where Christ's ministry first got traction;
- the place where he first called their names—and they followed;
- the place where God's reign grew wings;
- the place where he taught the crowds, healed the sick, offered compassion, fed the multitudes, blessed the children.
- The place where he spoke of a Messiah who would suffer and die, yes, and on the third day **RISE**.

Sermon copyright © 2011 by Pastor Erik Kindem, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. All rights reserved.

He promises to meet us just there, in all those places we have been asked by him to go. Where, we are assured, our acts of compassion, of healing, feeding, teaching—even suffering and dying—are undertaken with the assurance of his company.[1]

Where, friends, is that place for you?
Where will the words, HE IS NOT HERE, HE IS RISEN take you today?

Back to the "same old-same old"? Back to the yearning for security?…stability?

Stability, writes poet Luci Shaw,
is greatly overrated.
Why would I ever want to sit
still and smug as a rock,
confident, because of my great
weight, that I will not be moved?

Better to be soft as water,
easily troubled, with
at least three modes
of being, able to shape-
shift, to mirror, to cleanse,
to drift downstream,
[and, when I encounter the rock,
to roar.][2]

Christ's empty tomb is the epicenter of God's mission in this world.
- **Every wave and ripple flows out from this center**.
- **And he, the Risen One, goes ever ahead of us, beckoning us to follow.**

In the final verse of Matthew's gospel, after the community that was scattered by his crucifixion is gathered together once more, Jesus gives instructions and then this final promise.
I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, he tells them, EVEN TO THE END OF THE AGE.

There is no greater security than knowing this.

We are being summoned to join our lives to his mission, we are being called to ROAR.

For Christ is risen—he is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Amen.

[1] D. Cameron Murchison. *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 2*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), p. 350.
[2] *States of Being* by Luci Shaw, published in *The Christian Century*, 3/23/2011. http://www.christiancentury.org/search/apachesolr_search/luci%20shaw Her original last line reads: *"to roar when I encounter the rock."*