

To Do What is Next

Matthew 28:1-10 (April 12, 2020)

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2After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. 2And 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. 3His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 4For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. 5But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. 6He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 7Then 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.” 8So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. 10Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

Historical Context

Matthew records that they set a “seal on the stone” (Mt 27:66). This could be placed on the stone only in the presence of the Roman guards and was done to prevent anyone from tampering with the grave’s contents. After the guard inspected the tomb and rolled the stone in place, a cord was stretched across the rock and fastened with sealing clay. Finally, the clay packs were stamped with the official signet of the Roman governor. This seal on Jesus’ tomb was a public testimony that Jesus’ body was actually there. Also, because the seal was Roman, it verified the fact that His body was protected from vandals by the power and authority of the Roman Empire.

Theme: To Do What is Next

We tend to assume that when the women came to the tomb, they were completely unprepared for what they encountered. But this isn’t the way Matthew tells the story. In fact, Matthew takes great pains to suggest that the women are waiting and watching with a sense of anticipation.

When the women are first introduced in Matthew we learn that they have followed Jesus from Galilee and have “provided” for him. The women, then, are not latter-day tag-alongs. They have been intimately bound to Jesus, from the very first days in Galilee, and in following him have pursued the path of discipleship that Jesus’ himself models.

These women, who have watched the crucifixion from afar, and sat opposite the tomb where Jesus is laid, arrive as the first day of the week is dawning. When the women arrive, the earth shakes again as an angel descends from heaven, rolls back the stone from the tomb, and sits on it. The silent women are given a message from the angel that they are to carry to the disciples.

All this time we never actually hear the voices of the women. The emphasis, rather, is on what the women do. They follow, they provide, they watch, and they wait, and they go in order to see. And when they are told to go tell the disciples, the women depart quickly to carry out the task. They are women who, filled with anticipation, have come to the tomb to discover what is next and to do it.