

“Come and Go” Matthew 28:1-10

On a flight to Florida, an educational psychologist was preparing her notes for one of the parent – education seminars she conducts across the nation

The elderly woman sitting next to her explained that she was returning from Cleveland after having spent the Easter holidays visiting her 6 children, 18 grandchildren, and 10 great-grandchildren in Cleveland.

Then she inquired what her seat companion did for a living.

The psychologist told her fully expecting to be pestered with questions and free professional advice.

Instead, the elderly woman sat back, picked up a magazine and said, “If there’s anything you want to know, just ask me.”

Even experts can learn more. As some of you have experienced this past year, a doctor’s diagnosis isn’t always right. Because you paid an expert to do your tax returns doesn’t guarantee there will be no mistakes. Mike Holmgren, Manny Acta and Byron Scott are experts at what they do, but as we know so well in Cleveland, expertise doesn’t guarantee winning seasons. Although, between the Indians, the Monsters, and Betty White, Cleveland is pretty hot right now.

So who were the experts of Jerusalem, back on that first Easter Sunday?

The chief priests, the Pharisees, Pontius Pilate, maybe even Jesus’ disciples?

Wrong, Wrong, Wrong, and Wrong. At least when it came to the resurrection.

The gospel of Matthew tells us that on the first day of the week, early in the morning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary come to see Jesus' tomb. The two Marys are not educated experts. Through most of the gospel story, women such as these two are background personalities who along with children in that culture – were to be seen and not heard. It was a man's world. Until now.

Suddenly, there's a great earthquake, as an angel of the Lord comes and rolls back the stone and sits on it. His appearance is like lightning, and his clothing is as blinding white as sunlight on snow. The Jewish guards at the tomb are terrified and become stiff as corpses. These non-experts, not Roman guards but local Jewish guards have been put in place by the experts of Jerusalem – chief priests, Pharisees, Pontius Pilate – all of whom are home in bed.

The ones who see the truth are the guards. Non-experts stiff with fear.

The angel says to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.”

The two women come to see Jesus' tomb. The angel comes to the tomb and rolls back the stone. Now the angel tells the women to “come, see the place where he lay.” Come.

The women inch closer to the tomb, surely feeling dread but also intense curiosity. Of all Jesus' followers, they're the only ones who stayed close to his body since the crucifixion.

These two were the only ones who remained at the cross when Joseph of Arimathea took Jesus' body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his new tomb, no doubt with the help of the women.

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary are not experts. But give them credit. They are faithful. They do come to the right place at the right time the next morning. They come to the tomb. Come and go.

After gazing into the tomb and seeing its amazing, unexpected emptiness, the women hear the angel say, "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.'"

So they go from the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and run to tell the disciples. Based on the words of the angel and the sight of the empty tomb, the women believe Jesus has been raised. They have all the evidence they need.

But the angel got it wrong. They would see Jesus long before they go north to Galilee where the angel said they would see him. Jesus meets them on the road and says "Greetings!" There he is, early Sunday morning, big as life!

The women fall down before him, take hold of his feet and worship him.

But Jesus comforts them and encourages them, saying, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

They get up and go, two women, two non-experts, two faith-filled people who followed their heart in knowing when to come. Now they have heard, seen, and touched the truth of the resurrection when they follow Jesus' instructions to "go". They get up and go.

And how about the other eyewitnesses, the guards? Matthew tells us that some of them go into the city of Jerusalem and tell the chief priests everything that has happened. The priests see the resurrection as an inconvenient truth, so they conspire with the elders to pay off the soldiers with a large sum of money. In exchange for the cash, they are to tell everyone that Jesus' disciples came by night and stole his body away, while they were asleep. So the guards take the money and run, doing as they are directed.

In Matthew, two groups of non-experts make reports of the resurrection – women and guards. The women go and take their message to the disciples, and it spreads throughout the world. The guards deliver their report to the chief priests and it hits a dead end. But with both the women and the guards, the truth is embraced by non-experts who have a personal experience of resurrection life. The women knew when to come and then were willing to go and tell what they had seen, heard, and touched. Come and go.

Two thousand years have come and gone, and the very same is true today. The resurrection is still being reported by everyday people, non-experts, who have caught a glimpse of the risen Jesus in the middle of human life. Such sightings aren't face to face and don't include Easter morning foot grabbing. But in the mundane experiences of our everyday lives together, eyewitnesses still report that Jesus is alive and active in the lives of both individuals and communities.

The risen Jesus works through individuals in surprising and life-changing ways. During this past year in our Divinity ministry together, many of us have experienced renewal through the ministry of two young ladies. I share with you two short stories of resurrection life, of the risen Jesus working through Alexandra and Tina as written by them . . . I attended the Ash Wednesday service at Divinity, a year ago, and the following Sunday, the pastor spoke to me after the service and suggested I schedule a meeting with him. My original thought was I had done something wrong at communion because I had placed my hands over my chest, something I learned from the Catholic Church. This was not the case at all; in fact, in our first meeting, we discussed my dissertation research and I inquired about serving in the praise band.

On May 9, 2010, Divinity Lutheran Church welcomed me as a new member. After many years of struggling on my own in academia, I needed to affirm that I was an adopted child of God. In essence, for me, the whole dissertation process has become a testimony of God's hand at work – guiding, directing, and gently drawing me close to Him.

As a new Lutheran, anticipating the May 2011 graduation, I seek an opportunity to serve in an environment that allows me to focus on teaching and scholarly pursuits. I became a member of Divinity Lutheran Church in May 2010 after many years as a “seeker.” I approached my research as an ethnomusicologist – my goal was to understand how contemporary Christian music functioned in the lives of Christians. Along my dissertation journey, I discovered that contemporary Christian music can function as an evangelical tool to preserve, reinforce, and restore traditional Christian values and I am thankful that my dissertation research ultimately led me to the crossroads of Christianity and academia.

My pastor has inspired and encouraged me to find my voice as a Lutheran and as an academic; I only hope that my pursuit of a vocation in academia is not separate from my new life as a Lutheran.

And from Tina . . . Over the Thanksgiving holiday, I preached my first sermon. Since that time, many people have been introducing themselves to me and asking how I choose this path for myself, and how I know that God has chosen *me* for this journey. I love these conversations. They help me dig further into my own faith. This past Sunday, a member told me how proud she was for Divinity that I was entering seminary because she didn't think many people were brave enough to drop everything and carry the cross for Christ.

Truthfully, it isn't always easy to find the right language to tell the world that I want to be a pastor. Faith is different to each person. We live in a society where most people my age are more comfortable describing themselves as "spiritual" rather than "religious," if they are willing to admit believing at all. There are others who have issues with organized religion and for a lot of people, the pastor is the church. So when you introduce yourself as someone who is going to be a clergyperson, there is a strong likelihood that perceptions of the church, whether good or bad, will be placed on you. There is an instant intimacy that forms every time you say that you are becoming a pastor. Strangers are apt to tell you why they believe the Bible is a work of fiction just as often as they will confess to you their deepest fears.

I was sharing these thoughts with a friend who went to Ashland for music ministry, and she told me that once I got to seminary all this would balance out. "Just wait until you're surrounded

by Christians," she said. "You'll no longer have to explain why you know your beliefs are real. Everybody gets it." While my experience at Divinity has taught me there is nothing greater than growing my spirit in a community of Christ, this is not the type of Christian I want to be. I think we need to spread the news to people who don't get it. I want to be the Christian who is not afraid of the uncomfortable conversations; the one who doesn't shy from talking about how much better my life is by having an active relationship with God, or an active relationship with my church. I no longer want to pretend that my silence is respecting someone else's beliefs when really I am just afraid of the possibility they won't respect mine. I will not be the Christian who won't befriend an agnostic person because I fear a little theological controversy. My world will not be limited to fellow believers. How are we to evangelize if we don't share the greatest part of ourselves to the people who don't?

There is a responsibility that comes with being a disciple of Christ. It is not enough to just spread the good news, but we must hold ourselves accountable for the leadership we represent. As a leader, my every action must welcome a conversation to talk about Christ. It is my obligation to share how God's grace has blessed me. I need to share with people that since I first began publically talking about my faith, a load has lifted from me and I am experiencing true happiness for the first time in years. It is my responsibility to tell people that by accepting God's mission in my life, I laugh more easily, sleep more soundly, and treat myself better. That my relationships are more honest, that I am braver than I have ever been, and that as each day passes I learn more ways that God shows His love for me.

I know that this calling has a lot of responsibility, but there's a sense of freedom that comes with being given a platform to talk about my faith. I can finally be my true self.

Christ is risen! – Just as the women reported. The angel said to them: Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, “He has been raised!”

Come and commune with Him. Then go tell others about Him.

May the peace of God . . .

#389 – Christ is Alive! Let Christians Sing