

Matthew 28:1-10 [NIV]

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

² There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴ The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

⁵ The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

⁸ So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Would you take a Bible and turn back to Matthew, Chapter 28, with me? The first ten verses of Matthew 28: that is our text for today.

I mentioned a few weeks ago that I think we—or at least I, in my preaching in years past—have been far too quick to jump from Jesus' resurrection to some other usually totally disconnected theme or topic after Easter. In doing that, we miss a whole season, a whole chapter of Jesus' life and experience with His disciples.

The end of all the gospels and the beginning of the book of Acts all have something to say to us about the last part of Jesus' time here—in His resurrected body. These times: what? Was He on earth? Around earth? About earth? Upon earth? With earth?

When you have a body like Jesus did, such that you can walk through walls and doors and appear and disappear at will—I guess I don't know how to talk about a resurrected body in relation to earth.

Anyway, Jesus was with us for forty days following His resurrection, and I've really never explored that time. So that's what we're doing—for a few weeks anyway—in order to pull some insights from those remarkable days.

Today, we return to the very morning of the resurrection to an account that is read on most Easter Sundays: the women's meeting with the angel and then with Jesus at the tomb.

This is familiar. It's one of the foundational presentations of Jesus' resurrection. But there is something here in this text that I considered for the first time this past week: two times here, inside of ten verses, the women are told, once by an angel, there in verse 7, and once by Jesus Himself in verse 10, to tell the rest of the disciples to go to Galilee.

The angel says, and then Jesus repeats, "*Tell the disciples to go to Galilee.*"

Why?

Why did He do this?

Why Galilee?

Why was that so important that both the angel and Jesus mention it—and especially here, at this moment?

I mean, I'd think there would be lots of other things that a newly resurrected Jesus would want to say to his friends—to those he loved.

"Hey, I'm OK."

"All is fine."

"Yes, that hurt."

"What time is supper?"

I'd think there are other places He'd maybe like to go after an experience like that: maybe Disneyworld, maybe the beach...

Honestly, if I had been Jesus, I would have been tempted to go to the Temple, or maybe to the next meeting of the Sanhedrin (the Jewish counsel), or maybe to Pilate's house. You know, just drop in to say, "Hey."

But this, strangely, is the only thing it seems to me that's said twice in this moment: "Make sure they know to go to Galilee."

Actually, this is the third time it's mentioned. Jesus told this to the disciples before, back in chapter 26, out at the Mount of Olives. Or, maybe it was while they were on their way there.

It was in the middle of a discussion they were having, the one where Jesus was saying to them, "You know, all of you are going to leave me; even tonight, you're all going to desert me."

And Peter was arguing with Him, "No Jesus, even if everyone else does, I won't."

And so, Jesus had to set him straight about that.

It was right there in the midst of that conversation when Jesus first told them, "You don't get it at the moment, but after this is all over, I'll see you in Galilee."

So—why? Why meet in Galilee?

Why is this so important that it's mentioned so often, and on the morning of the resurrection, of all times?

Well, to begin with a bit of geography: Galilee is not a town or a city. It's a region, an area of Israel, in the north of the nation.

And of course, Jesus' arrest and crucifixion and burial all happened in, or just outside, the city of Jerusalem, which is in the region of Judea about 75 miles south of Galilee. The two regions were separated by another region, Samaria.

So, there was quite a distance between the two areas, especially, if you're walking. It's about the distance between Lexington and Cincinnati, so you get an idea in your mind.

But in Jesus' day, the miles were not the only thing that separated these two regions of Israel.¹ There were significant political differences, historical differences, cultural differences, geographic, topographic differences.

The differences were something similar to how we'd think of the differences in our nation between the north and the south, or between the Midwest and the northeast or between the west coast and, well, just about every place else.

This is a drastic simplification, of course, but generally, Galilee was more county, more liberal in their thinking about spiritual things. By that I mean they were "less legalistic" than those in Judea, and especially those in Jerusalem.

Judeans, on the other hand, considered the Galileans of the north their "country cousins." They thought they were hicks, if you will—less sophisticated, less articulate, less educated, and less serious about spiritual things—especially less serious about religious ritual, since Galilee was so far away from the Jerusalem temple, which was the center of Judaism in Jesus' day.

And so, the result of all this was that even an impeccably Jewish Galilean would not have felt as though he was really among his own people in first century Judea, and especially in Jerusalem. New Testament scholar R.T. France wrote that such a man would have been "as much a foreigner in Judea as an Irishman would be in London or a Texan in New York. His accent would immediately mark him as 'not one of us.'"

Not one of us.

Have you ever been—or been made to feel, "not one of us"?

Have you ever been in a place with a people where, even though you share the very same foundations, what has been built upon that foundation makes you feel "not one of us"?

That's not really a place you want to stay, is it?

That's why some faithful Christ-followers leave churches. Even though all are Christians, some church environments—some church groups, some church people—whether intentionally or not become so narrow that they tend to communicate, "You're not one of us."

Healthy churches—healthy church groups, healthy Christian people—work hard to recognize this tendency and avoid it, or overcome it, in order to welcome all who are seriously interested in following Jesus.

I hope we do that.

But the fact is, it even happened to Jesus, who, though He was born in Bethlehem of Judea, was really a product of Galilee. He's Jesus of Nazareth, after all, and Nazareth was a city in Galilee.

And all of that prejudice of the supposedly superior culture of Jerusalem, the capital city, stood against Jesus and His claim to be heard—even as a prophet, even as the "Messiah."

So, considering all that, we can more easily see why Jesus was treated as He was in Jerusalem *and* why Jesus

sent the disciples back to Galilee—why meeting them there was so important.

He was sending them back home, you see? Back to familiar surroundings and back to the place where nearly all of Jesus' miracles took place.

He wanted to meet them again and talk to them where they could feel safe. Where they could have free and honest conversations. Where they could understand each other apart from all the societal noise. Where they could gather in large groups and not raise suspicions, as would have surely happened if hundreds or even dozens of His followers would have gathered in downtown Jerusalem.

You see, some things are just more easily done in safe, familiar, friendly environments. So, the short of it is, I think Jesus wanted to take them home, but not just for the sake of their being at home, or being among their people, or being safe or being at ease.

Returning Himself and His disciples to Galilee was part of their being restored to each other, you see?

The fact is, the closer everyone got to Jerusalem, the more squirrely everything became. The crowds. The triumphal entry. The mob. The arrest. All the disciples leaving Jesus.

The closer to the city they got, the weirder things got. Which is still true about cities today—but that's another issue.

In the minds of the disciples, you see, going to Jerusalem was supposed to represent this huge revolution of earthly power. That's what they thought Jesus was doing. All the way to the end, that's what they thought.

But it didn't happen as they thought. Their thinking was too small—their worlds were too small, and so in reality, what that trip to Jerusalem did was damage relationships and dash expectations. Their hopes of a great political savior just evaporated, and now the future was cloudy and uncertain.

They were a bunch of normal, sensible, yet disillusioned country people in a hostile city, with all they had understood as truth yanked out from under them—and with no sure place to turn.

And Jesus knew this. He knew that He had to get them out of the city in order to recalibrate them—to correct their expectations—so they could see things clearly and regain perspective and to start over again in purpose and in relationship.

He had to take them home in order to do that.

And you know, really, I think we probably understand that—maybe more than we know.

It's funny how powerful geography is. It has probably happened to all of us at some time or another. Sometimes, you just need a different place—a different view in order to see things—to make sense of things and to regain right perspective.

And, of course Jesus knew this—it has been part of His plan to return them to Galilee—in order for this sort of restoration to take place.

¹ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT, 2007

He even hints at that in his words there in verse 10: Jesus tells the women, *“Go and tell my **brothers.**”*

He uses the word, *“brothers.”*

He does not say, *“Go and tell those deserters.”* He does not call them *“cowards,”* or *“former friends,”* or even just the *“guys.”*

You see, even here, Jesus has started the restoration process already. He is already offering peace and hope, and He brings it to completion in Galilee – in familiar surroundings, in peace, among friends, around people they knew: people who thought as they did. People who talked as they did.

In taking His followers to Galilee, Jesus was calling them home – home to Him.

Jesus does that. He sees to details in our lives that we don't even think of and that we would probably never even consider, all for the sake of our healing and our wholeness – and all so that, as easily and completely as possible, we can return to relationship with Him.

He makes things happen in our lives that push us toward faith – that encourage and feed faith, which then makes returning to Him easier.

I think that's one reason why going to Galilee was so important.

I think Jesus also took them back to Galilee to show them that, as special as Jerusalem is in the eternal, historical, eschatological sense, His Kingdom is not really centered there or in any other earthly locality.

The Kingdom of God isn't about earthly politics, you see?

The Kingdom of God is about godly people doing God's will, and honestly, He probably had to get His disciples out of the *“city of earthly politics”* in order to help them grasp that.

And He still has to do that today, you know – in the lives of His followers. Most of us way too easily get way too wrapped up in earthly concerns, to the point that we all but forget that we're citizens, first and foremost, of a Kingdom of another world.

Sometimes Jesus has to get us out of the Jerusalems of our lives to remind us of that, because as long as we're giving all our attention to earthly kings and kingdoms, we're not going to be as useful as we could be to our divine King.

Jesus took His followers to Galilee to remind them that God has far greater purposes for them – quite apart from the Jerusalems of this world, and we'll never be really whole until we embrace that eternal reality and perspective. We'll always be split down the middle, caught between two worlds – two masters.

Jesus had to get them out of Jerusalem to show them that.

Another thing Jesus did for His disciples in taking them to Galilee was to give them a new purpose – a new sense of call and mission.

We'll most likely talk more about that next Sunday, but that was part of their healing too, you see?

We all need a calling. We all need work. We all need something of value to which to give ourselves, to know

that we're making a difference and that we're doing something of even eternal importance.

Jesus had to get them out of Jerusalem to remind them of the greater world and their greater purpose in that world.

Jerusalem told them they were failures, but Jesus knew better than that.

You know – I find great comfort in that statement: *“Jesus knows better than that.”*

“Jesus knows better.”

That's a statement of faith.

“Jesus knows better.”

He knows better than we do.

He knows more about *us* than we do.

He knows more about what we *need*,

about how we *think*,

about what we *value*,

about what is *right* with us,

and about what is *wrong* with us.

And that fact is exactly why Jesus sometimes either *brings* or *allows* circumstances in our lives to shake us up and to move us out of where we might be at the moment.

He does that because He knows we need it.

In everything Jesus did, even things that seemed to make no sense at the time, even sending his friends on a 75-mile hike to Galilee...in everything He did, He was working toward making them whole. He was making them the people they were created to be.

That was what was important to Jesus, you see?

That's why He went to the cross. To redeem people. To make people whole.

That's the goal of His Kingdom: to redeem, to restore, to make everything about *us* and *all creation* whole and well. Everything Jesus does, He does toward that end.

He did it back then, while He walked on earth.

And He does it today, in the lives of His people – in the lives of whoever will follow Him.

In order to be healed, in order to be whole, in order to be what God intended us to be, we have to be willing to go where He sends us.

Let me say too, that, quite frankly, it makes no difference if it makes sense to us at the moment or not, because our sensibilities are limited.

Our vision about what's ahead – even our perception about what's real and what isn't – is all very limited.

I mean, those disciples, they could have come up with a dozen very sensible sounding reasons why they should not go to Galilee:

They were tired.

They were confused.

They were in danger.

They had no money.

They had no idea where they would get any money.

They had no idea what the future held.

It would be embarrassing to go home after all this.

We'll look like failures!

What would happen once we get there?

What would we do?

What would our families say?

What's the point?

What's the purpose?

Surely Jesus can do here in Jerusalem what He can do in Galilee, can't he?

I don't understand.

It doesn't make sense to me.

I don't see the logic of it.

The reasons to question to doubt, to wonder, to justify our opinions go on and on and on.

But in the end, you see, the issue really comes down to this: do we really believe that Jesus knows better? When Jesus says to go somewhere, will we trust Him enough to obey Him or will we not?

Will we do what Proverbs 3 says: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding?"

Will we submit to Him in all our ways so that He can direct our paths?

Or will we lean on our own understanding, and so remain broken.

For the reason's I've mentioned and likely many more, going to Galilee was part of the disciples' restoration. They couldn't have known why at the time, and they didn't need to know.

All they really needed to know was, "Jesus knows better, So I trust His wisdom. I trust His motive. If Jesus says to do this, I'm going to do it."

"Jesus said to go to Galilee, so I'm going to go."

And that's where all that was broken in them was restored. It's where they were made whole.

There are people all over our world today – and I'd imagine people sitting right in this room – seeking healing: people who know something is not right with them, with their marriage, with their family, with relationships in their lives.

And maybe a good number of them pray and pray and pray – asking Jesus to restore them.

The problem is, most of those people want healing on their own terms. They want to set the agenda. They want to set the timeline. They want to set the place and the method. They want to go where they want and do as they please – and still receive Jesus' restoration.

But that's just not how it works.

To receive restoration from Jesus, you have to go where *He* sends. Whether that's to Galilee or someplace else –

Whether it's a short walk or long.

Whether it's convenient or difficult.

Whether it takes moments or years.

To receive Jesus' restoration, we have to go where He sends us.

So, the question is, where is He sending you?

And, are you willing to go?

He's sending you there for His best, and for your best, for your healing, for good purposes that you may know nothing of.

He's sending you there because that's where He is. He'll be there when you arrive.

Are you looking for restoration – for healing? Will you go where He's sending you? Will you decide to do that even today?

Prayer

Closing Song: *Jesus Calls Us*

Benediction: May the Lord give us all the conviction and the courage and the power to go where He sends us – so that we can meet Him there and receive His best.