

Easter Sunday
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
Rev. Jason S. Glombicki
April 16th, 2017

It was a Sunday afternoon in May. 8-year-old Sergio walked down a street in his hometown in Chile. As he walked with the cobblestone below his feet and the sun beating on his face, he began to feel a little off-balance. Within seconds he fell to the ground. From the ground, he saw chimneys falling through roofs and electrical wires swinging from telephone poles. For the next ten minutes, this earthquake rattled his hometown, which geographically moved 30 feet westward. As the town moved, a large tsunami wave started flowing across the Pacific Ocean headed toward Hawaii, Japan, and the Philippines. When that rattling finally stopped, it was named the largest recorded earthquake in history.

While we don't often have noticeable quakes in Illinois, you may have noticed today's gospel had a resurrection earthquake. Matthew is the only gospel to mention this earthquake. And it's not the first time we heard a quake in Matthew. When Jesus came into Jerusalem, on what we call Palm Sunday, Jesus caused "turmoil" or, translated differently from the original Greek, Jesus' entrance "shook" the city (21:10). Again, Jesus' death caused an earthquake that split rocks and opened graves (27:51-52). Today's earthquake is yet another time the world was shaken.

Shaken. I'm not a huge fan of that word. Unless shaken has something to do with a mixed drink, I usually don't think it's positive. Many things in life shake us - a diagnosis, the end of a relationship, a divisive election, the death of a loved one, addiction, war, shame, a revealed secret, our aging bodies, and the unknown all destabilize us. We work to avoid unexpected sharp changes.

Investors look to avoid being caught in a shakeout. We wish to avoid an intimidating shakedown. However, like an earthquake, we cannot forecast the moments that will shake our lives.

So too both Mary's had no idea that their lives would be rattled on that first day of the week. Although we show up to church with knowledge that they will find an empty tomb. The Mary's did not have that foreknowledge. So, when they got to the tomb they were shaken.

However, in Matthew the earthquake communicates something specific. While you and I often explain earthquakes in geological terms, the bible uses earthquakes during theophanies or apocalyptic events. In other words, biblical earthquakes are manifestations of God's power. Earthquakes communicate God's presence.

I think that an earthquake is an interesting image. If you ask Sergio or any earthquake survivor, I doubt they'd notice God's presence *during* the earthquake. Instead, they might have been praying that God would save them from the quake! Earthquakes are destructive; earthquakes kill; earthquakes are unpredictable; earthquakes do not exude the qualities of God that we appreciate, like grace, love, life, and light.

Yet, if we think about the resurrection story, we'd recall that we never hear anyone observe the actual resurrection. We don't hear *how* Christ comes to life. But, I am convinced, that Christ's resurrection likely began in a dark, lonely tomb.

You see, resurrection often begins in deep darkness. Bringing life back to something first requires death. Death, darkness, rock bottom, and loneliness are prerequisites for resurrection. I've never met anyone who says, "My life is perfect – I'm satisfied, challenged, loved, and balanced – *and* I want to change everything about my life." Generally, if things are going well, then we make small tweaks and continue onward. But when things are at their worst, when our life seems gone,

when we're depressed, when we are sick, when we are overwhelmed, those are the moments when we yearn for resurrection.

One of my greatest problems in those dark moments is embracing my own vulnerability. When things are at rock bottom, I don't often want to admit it, even to myself. I don't want to take risks at my worst. I'd much rather numb my emotions with anything, anything at all. However, Brene Brown notes that we "cannot selectively numb emotion. You can't say, here's the bad stuff. Here's vulnerability, here's grief, here's shame, here's fear, here's disappointment. I don't want to feel these. I'm going to have a couple of beers and a banana nut muffin. You cannot selectively numb. So, when we numb those, we numb joy, we numb gratitude, we numb happiness. And then, we are miserable...so we have a couple of beers and a banana nut muffin. And it becomes this dangerous cycle."¹

Jesus' approach was markedly different. Instead of numbing vulnerability, he stepped into it. Instead of allowing the shame cast by the religious leaders to consume him, he remembered that he's God's beloved son. Instead of allowing disappointment in his abandonment devour him, he cried out to God acknowledging God's presence. Instead of avoiding the vulnerability of rejection and sidestepping the vulnerability of death, Jesus risked it all for connection. Jesus stepped into vulnerability.

Let me be vulnerable for a moment: I'm one of the worst gardeners in the world. Glad I got that off my chest! I know that statement is not *that* vulnerable. But, I'm ashamed that I simply forget my plants and, then, they die. Anyway, I got a new snake plant and put on my kitchen counter so I remember to water it. Even next to the sink, I forget on occasion. One day last week I

¹ https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability/transcript?language=en#t-866699

was looking at the plant and, behold, there was a sprout coming out of the soil. Over the next few days I watched it. As it pushed its way to the surface, I noticed that the soil was gradually moving around it. That seed was originally planted deep in the darkness. Knowing that I don't often water it, this seed, being vulnerable, began to sprout. I didn't even notice it under the soil. Then, the earth began to shake. Things began to change. New life began to sprout, and the ground was not and could not remain the same.

You see, that is resurrection. Resurrection results in an earthquake. When new things come to life, things change. The ground shifts. We shift. In fact, scientists believe that if the earth's crust did not move and shift life as we know it would not have formed.² On top of that, the beautiful mountains where we have spiritual experiences, are a gift of plates crashing together which lead to earthquakes. And, the forming of new islands, like Hawaii, are the gifts of the shifting tectonic plates, which also cause earthquakes.

Much like that vulnerable little seed that poked out through the soil to bring new life, so too resurrection is full of earth-shattering vulnerability. Jesus' resurrection reminds us that nothing, nowhere, and no moment is ever safe from the resurrection. God disrupts the cosmic order of the world, shifting the firm ground on which we stand. God reminds us to be vulnerable to ourselves and one another so that we might be open to life-giving change.

The Mary's at the tomb that first Easter morning were just that – open. They were overcome by both fear *and* joy. These women were altogether too full: they are afraid for joy. It's the kind of feeling we have when we fall in love, when we witness the birth of a child, or when we

² <http://www.businessinsider.com/plate-tectonics-key-to-life-on-earth-2014-4>

lean over the rim of the Grand Canyon.³ It's joyful and fearful. It's vulnerable in its uncertainty. It changes our lives.

Then, those two women ran, they became messengers. It was women, not men, who became the first evangelists. They told of their experience of the resurrection. While we cannot ever prove the resurrection and how it happened, I'm not sure that it matters. Proving the resurrection isn't our goal, but rather experiencing the resurrection is our focus. Once you experience resurrection you'll tell of it, you'll be an evangelist for resurrection. // On a superficial level, it's like when someone finds a new product or hack that changes their life, they tell everyone about it. They go in to litanies of what this thing has done for them, to them, and the life it gives them. // So too, these women go to tell of their experience. They go, but they do not go alone. For, as one colleague puts it, "the resurrected Christ is pure movement, elusive, evasive, he goes ahead of us, [and] will not be held by us." A true and living God seems to enjoy shocking and shaking - shocking the religious and political leaders of Jesus' time and shaking those who think they are tight with God.⁴

Well, there it is. I've used all those words to remind you of this: resurrection calls us to emulate Christ's vulnerability. Resurrection encourages us to embrace the vulnerability that we will ultimately die. Yet, abundant life is found in that vulnerability. For when we live without fear, then we can truly live a more peaceful and generous life. When we're vulnerable we become open to God's tremors; we begin to recognize that new life is often found in the deep darkness and the earth-shattering shock waves. And once we experience that shaken new-life, a life filled with

³ Dietrich, Richard S., *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Feasting on the Word. Year A. Vol 2 Lent through Eastertide*. "Easter Vigil: Matthew 28:1-10," page 351.

⁴ <http://willimon.blogspot.com/2010/04/preaching-and-resurrection-jesus.html>

uncertainty and risk, at that moment we look at the barren cross, we gaze at the empty tomb, and then we look off into the distance. For there, in the distance, we see the risen Christ in that unknown vulnerability, and it's there on that trembling ground where we can experience eternal life. Alleluia! "Praise God." Amen!