

Mark D. Reichert

Easter Day – Matthew 28:1-10 – Why Does Easter Matter?

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The chants of the scared and indignant cascaded down onto lawmakers at the Tennessee state capitol building last week. “*Children are dead!*” “*Book bags not body bags!*” “*Save our children!*” cried so many who were desperate for help and just didn’t know where to find it.

Yet another mass shooting at The Covenant School in Nashville, TN in recent days is just one more horrific tragedy in a line of hundreds that have come before it and hundreds of lives that have been lost because of them. Six more souls were lost this time because of anger, bitterness, resentment – ultimately selfishness. Why does this keep happening? How much worse can this get? And what can we do to stop it?

Make no mistake, there are plenty of ideas. Stricter gun laws. Armed guards. Stronger security measures. More mental health liaisons. There are lots of different ideas about how to stop the bleeding and fix this problem in our society, and yet a problem as complicated as this one has so far defied any simple solution.

But it seems like one solution that’s being met with less and less patience in our society is thoughts and prayers. “*Thoughts and prayers are not enough,*” “*Thoughts and prayers are useless to dead children*” – these are the views that we see on TV and online, that spiritual sentiments don’t mean much in reality. Well, if thoughts and prayers don’t matter, then ***why does Easter matter?*** What does this day and this event have to do with all the problems we have going on in the real world right now?

See, the *biggest* part of this problem we’re having is that we aren’t acknowledging the real *heart* of the problem. The real heart of the problem isn’t the weapons at our disposal. It isn’t social inclusiveness. It isn’t the action or inaction of lawmakers. It’s *sin* – it’s sin that causes hatred, it’s sin that causes tragedy, it’s sin that causes death, and that sin isn’t something that we can just point the finger and pin on someone else. That sin is in every human heart. And as long as that is true, then shootings and tragedies won’t stop – and what’s more, no amount of money allocated or legislation passed is going to bring back any of those we’ve lost.

And *that’s* why ***Easter matters***, because what our politicians and public servants could not guarantee, Jesus did when he came out of his grave. The sadness will end, the tragedy will end, death itself will end because Jesus lives. No matter how many solutions you hear in the media and how many opinions you see online, the one solution that will work to do away with sin and bring life back from death is this: Christ is risen, he is risen indeed, alleluia!

And that’s what those women who went to Jesus’ tomb that morning needed so badly to find out for themselves. See, death is our greatest enemy, and it causes our greatest hurts. It takes away the people we love, and it hounds us every day until it finally takes us, too. That’s what these women were going through. They were going to Jesus’ tomb one last time to say goodbye. They had lost their dearest friend and their sorrows were almost too much to bear. But when they got to that garden grave, they found an angel of God who rolled back that stone and revealed an empty tomb that couldn’t hold Jesus in. He told them, “*Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.*” Christ is risen and death is fallen, he said; that changed everything and freed them from their sorrows. No longer did death have power over their Savior, and so no longer did death have power over them, either. And when they actually saw their living Lord, all their hurts were driven away and he gave them hope like nothing they could find anywhere else. Jesus lives, now and forever – and that promise goes for you too, friends. If you’re struggling with sorrows over losing loved ones or over what’s going on in our world or even over the prospect of your own death someday, ***Easter matters*** for you because Jesus’ resurrection means that you will live forever with him and all of our brothers and sisters who fell asleep in faith – guaranteed, no doubt about it – and you will never have to say goodbye to any of them ever again.

And because Christ is risen, that means we’ve also been freed from all of our fears. Twice these women were told not to be afraid. It’s pretty easy to understand why they were – it’s not every day we come face to face with supernatural beings doing supernatural things. But then also, these were sinful women in the presence of holiness. They thought their Lord was dead, and that meant their faith was futile and they could never stand before that kind of bright, burning glory; so they were afraid and ashamed because of the darkness in their hearts. They and the disciples both knew what had happened to Jesus a few days before and they knew that it was ultimately their sins that sent him to die on that cross – and that’s just as true for us now, too. All the anger, the bitterness, the resentment we feel in our hearts and lives – isn’t that really just our own sinful hearts trying desperately to deflect the fact that we sinful humans have done this to ourselves because we’ve gone away from God and his Word? We haven’t been the spouses, the parents, the siblings, the children, the students, the workers, the neighbors, the citizens, the Christians that we should be. No, we all know how far short we fall before God, and so we too *had* good reason to fear. But then Christ rose, and his message rang out even to you and me, don’t be afraid. See, the reason Jesus went to the cross in the first place was to take away those sins, to bury the hatchet, to rebuild the bridge and make things right for us with God again. We don’t need to be afraid of his holiness anymore because that’s exactly what Jesus gives us by faith. Jesus shed his blood to wash you clean of your sins and grant you his perfect righteousness. Now holiness for us isn’t something to fear – it’s something that for Christ’s sake we’ve been given; it’s our ticket into heaven, and nothing can take that away from us.

That's because Jesus' resurrection is undeniable proof that our sins are forgiven and that God accepted Jesus' sacrifice for us on the cross. Jesus freed us from our sins when he rose from the dead because that's how he showed beyond a shadow of a doubt that his perfect death was sufficient to redeem humanity, and that's how he showed that sin and death and the grave have no power over us anymore. Christ is our Champion, our Conqueror, our Risen Lord, and the devil and all the forces of evil don't stand a chance against him. My brothers and sisters, ***Easter matters*** for us because Christ's victory on Easter morning is our victory. By his death and resurrection our Savior crushed the devil's head; he emptied sin of its dreadful tyranny; and he took away the terror of death by making it for us simply now the gate to eternal life.

By his resurrection, Jesus freed us *from* our sorrows, our fears, and our sins. But what's maybe even greater is that he freed us *for* joy, for brotherhood, and for heaven with him forever. When that angel appeared to the women, showed them the empty tomb, and told them that Christ is Risen, they "*hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. 'Greetings,' he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.'*"

You know, it can be hard to tell here just what a huge emphasis there is on joy in this story. What it actually says is that the women hurried away from the tomb with fear and *great* joy and when suddenly Jesus met them, he said to them literally, "Rejoice!" No doubt, these women still had some fears and some struggles throughout their lives, and just like those women, we too have worries and doubts that darken our worlds. Until Jesus comes back, things like mass shootings and natural disasters and health emergencies and job and family crises and government problems and all kinds of other tragedies aren't going anywhere, and neither are any of the other effects of sin in our lives that we see all around us. And on top of that, our consciences still try to accuse us and it can sometimes feel like we drag around our guilt like weights and chains. But no more, because Christ is risen, and so now we have the joy and the release that go along with it. All the bad things that happen to us here in this world are just the devil's empty lies and temptations and deceptions that are only meant to scare you and hurt you – but they mean nothing for you anymore, because he has no power over you. We have joy from Jesus that can never be taken away from us, because our Savior is alive and victorious. ***Easter matters*** because it means that all our sins are forgiven, we are reconciled to God, and we have the certainty of eternal salvation. Our lives have real meaning and purpose now and we don't have to worry about our relationship with God or what's going to happen to us after this life anymore, because we have the unending joy of knowing that Christ is risen.

And don't miss that one awesome word that Jesus uses: "*go and tell my brothers.*" Though we were once enemies of God and slaves under the devil's power because of our sins, when

Jesus rose up from the grave, he shattered those chains and threw the devil down in defeat. Jesus freed us from our slavery and made us his own dear brothers. Not just servants, not just disciples, not just friends – his true brothers and sisters! Do you see what that means? We're at peace with God now, and we've become his very own family. And if we are his own family, then we are also heirs of God's heavenly Kingdom – you who may think sometimes that you don't matter in this world, you are heavenly royalty, and that means that you have all the greatest benefits and blessings of being God's very own beloved children. God isn't someone to be feared or to worry about anymore – no, he's your heavenly Father now who loves you more than anything in all creation. You can know that your God is looking down on you with love and holding you in his hands now; he's protecting you and caring for you every day of your lives; he's listening to your prayers and taking them into account as he rules creation for your good; and he's guiding your lives until he finally takes you home to heaven, where he's preparing a place for you right now.

And that's really the greatest thing about Jesus' resurrection. ***Easter matters*** most of all because when it was all said and done, after everything Jesus went through for us, the bottom line is that we get eternal life with him in heaven's perfect paradise forever. What a blessing it was that those women and the disciples and hundreds more witnesses got to see Jesus face-to-face after his resurrection. They were so overjoyed and he meant so much to them that they fell at his feet, grabbed onto him, and wouldn't let go. And my friends, because Jesus lives, we too have the promise that one day we'll be able to do the same – maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but soon. When our lives spin out of control, we can cling to Jesus and his Word and promises, because by his death and resurrection for us he overcame this sinful world and now he calls us out of it as well – not just to Galilee like he told the disciples, but he calls us to heaven. There we too will see our Savior face-to-face, we'll meet his warm embrace that we've so longed for, and we will never have to let go. We'll fall down before him in worship, we'll be given the crown of life as heirs of God's heavenly Kingdom, and we'll know that we've finally made it home to be at Jesus' side forever.

You know, I'm sure that in the midst of all that fear and anger in Nashville in these last days, those chants must still haunt everyone there: *Children are dead! Save our children! Do something!* Thank God that that's exactly what Jesus did. No matter the tragedy, sin is the cause and death is the consequence, and *we* haven't been able to stop either one. So then why does Easter matter? ***Easter matters*** because Christ conquered cause and consequence. Jesus saved our children – and all the rest of us, too – from sin and death when he gave his life for us on the cross and then rose again from the grave to guarantee that everyone who believes in him will one day rise to live with him in heavenly perfection forever. So over against the chants of this world's fear and anger, God grant us Easter peace and joy to keep this chant always on our lips: Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia! Amen.