

The First and Franklin St. Presbyterian Church
 Baltimore, MD
 April 24, 2011

Alison Halsey
 Matthew 28:1-10
 Easter

And You Just Thought!

The Lord is risen!
He is risen, indeed!
 (*One more time*) The Lord is risen!
He is risen, indeed!

I want us to have the same spirit as Matthew's angel. This is no kind and caring Christmas angel, this is an angel with an attitude, an angel who is worthy of a long flowing sparkling white cape in addition to his wings. Listen again to the beginning of the story: *And 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. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes white as snow. (V. 2,3)* His coming into our world is so forceful it creates an earthquake and then with super hero strength to match his appearance which can only be described as looking like lightening (I see bolts of electricity shooting out from all sides of him) he single handedly moves the giant stone away from the front of the tomb, and then just for good measure he sits on it. The men sent to guard the tomb pass out and the women are scared to death. Can't you just see this diva of an angel posed there, shoulders back, chest thrust out, arms crossed in front of him, a smug look on his face, saying: "You thought you had him dead and buried, well think again!"?

This audacious angel knows this is the only entrance he can make which is worthy of the message he was sent to share: "Don't be afraid. The Lord has been raised! Yes indeed, the Lord is risen!" After all the sinister plots to do Jesus in, the sham of the trial, the beatings and touting, the shadowy dealings of the authorities, and the midday darkness which silhouetted the cross upon which he was hung, a new day was dawning. A new light was shining in the history of our world, this world had become the kingdom of our God, and it was his task to proclaim it.

This is good news, no it is great news! Since it means nothing is nailed down and anything is possible, and hope can be restored. Yet this makes some folks nervous and fearful. The passage before the resurrection and the one following it both tell tales of individuals in positions of authority seeking to make sure either Jesus doesn't get out or that the word of his apparent resurrection doesn't get spread around. The Lord is risen is not good news to those who like things nailed down, neat and tidy, and who don't want things to change much. We recognize them by such phrases as "those were the good old days," or "but we have always done it that way before" "What was wrong with the way it was?" or "let's restore America's values to the day when God, guns and guts made it great." We know people who say such, we hear them on TV or on the radio, they live in our neighborhoods, are a part of our families or we see them when we look in the mirror. There is good news for them as well - Christ was raised for them, too. Easter is not the time for artful arguments. The past is over and gone and he has made everything new. God's recreating Spirit is blowing in our world. We thought we had things figured out and God laughed.

New life for all of us begins when God gets our attention and we stop being so fearful. Sometimes God doesn't need much: a word from a friend, a vision in a dream, a spectacular sunset, other times it may take the equivalent of an earthquake to wake us up.

Everything can change, will ultimately change because God is in charge. Hope is reborn. The Lord is risen and we are alive and that means there is work for us to do. When Jesus appears to the women he tells them, "Don't be afraid! Go, tell my brothers to go to Galilee - there they will see me." There is a task for them

to do. He wants them all to know that what he preached and what he did is still very much alive - not in him but in them. The Kingdom of which he preached is where they are and wherever they chose to be. Their work is to do what he did - heal the sick, free the oppressed, welcome the outcast. His kingdom is wherever people invest in peace in place of war; wherever they reach across the barriers that divide God's children, barriers such as race, or gender, or sexual orientation, or economic class or even religion. "Go" Jesus tells them, "It is your task now, I promise I will be with you and God's spirit will open the way for you."

- Go, don't be afraid, write letters and march for peace and justice and equality and bring my new life to those who are oppressed.
- Go, don't be afraid, visit and build a relationship with the older person who lives in your neighborhood and bring my new life to their lonely existence.
- Go, don't be afraid to cross the boundaries of our city and tutor a child in an inner city school and open my new life of reading and exploration for her.
- Go, don't be afraid to share your financial resources with those who are in need by letting go of the need for things, your life will gain my new life.
- Go, don't be afraid to share the good news about what your faith has meant to you with your neighbors or friends and open that world of new life for them that they may have with me.
- Go, don't be afraid to go to the dark places of our world and bring Christ's light and hope and joy.
- Go, don't be afraid, go with all the gusto of the angel, go prepared to act so as to shake the very foundations of the earth proclaiming;

The Lord is risen!
The Lord is risen, indeed!