

Sermon: Jesus is Risen!
Easter Day, Year A
Acts 10:34-43, Matthew 28:1-10

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Happy Easter! Jesus is risen. Halleluiah! In Matthew's Gospel reading as Mary Magdalene and the other Mary approach the tomb where they believe Jesus is laid, suddenly there is a great earthquake. An angel, a very spunky and audacious angel, descends from heaven, rolls back the stone from Jesus' tomb and plops down on the stone, as if to say "ta dah!" Dressed in electric white clothing, he makes a splash on the scene.

The guards are so freaked out they shake and become like dead men. The women are presumably also freaking out as the angel speaks to them saying, "Don't be afraid; I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He's not here for he has been raised." He invites them to take a look at the place where Jesus HAD been laid and then says to the women, "no lolly gagging, you need to get on down the road to Galilee! There you will see Jesus." And before they know what is what, Jesus is there greeting them. Greetings! (Who actually ever says "Greetings"?) He probably actually said something more like Shl'am I-ken! in the Aramaic language he spoke.

Jesus appearing first to the women would have seemed a strange thing to most in first century Palestine for in many ways it was a man's world. Most of the religious and political leaders were men and most of the culture was patriarchal. But remember the earth shook when Jesus rose from the dead. And shook up the understanding of who counted in God's kingdom. In Jesus's life and death and resurrection he spoke a message of inclusivity. Women (and men) mattered to him; the lame, the blind, the hungry, the guilty, the prostitute and tax collectors mattered to him.

In our Acts passage, we hear that *God shows no partiality but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.* In our Gospel passage we are given a clear message that women were not second class citizens, were nothing less than first rate in Jesus' eyes. This may or may not be a novel idea to us in 21st century Staunton. And yet, we are always being challenged to consider who matters in the life of God.

One of Emmanuel's members shared with me a story I want to share with you today. It is about a message of welcome posted on the doors off Coventry Cathedral in England. When visitors arrive this is the message they see:

We extend a special welcome to those who are single, married, divorced, widowed, straight, gay, confused, well-heeled or down-at-heel. We especially welcome wailing babies and excited toddlers. We welcome you whether you can sing like Pavarotti or just growl quietly to yourself. You're welcome here if you're just browsing, just woken up, or just got out of prison. We don't care if you're more Christian than the Archbishop of Canterbury or haven't been to church since Christmas 10 years ago. We extend a special welcome to those who are over 60 but not grown up yet and to teenagers who are growing up too fast.

We welcome keep-fit moms, football dads, starving artists, tree huggers, latte sippers, vegetarians, junk food eaters. We welcome those are in recovery or still addicted. We welcome you if you're having problems, are down in the dumps or don't like organized religion. We're not that keen on it either. We offer welcome to those who think the earth is flat, work too hard, don't work, can't spell, or are here because Granny is visiting and wanted to come to the cathedral. We welcome those who are inked, pierced, both or neither. We offer a special welcome to those who could use a prayer right now, had religion shoved down their throats as kids or got lost on the ring road and wound up here by mistake. We welcome pilgrims, tourists, seekers, doubters and you.

This Easter Day the church offers you the proclamation of the Gospel, which tells us that a God who was willing to die for us is risen. He is alive. Death has been defeated. You can respond to that news like the guards who shook and froze like dead men or you can respond like the faithful women who were fearful at first and moved into joy as they encountered the living Christ. Christ's central message was about love; love your neighbor. We at Emmanuel welcome you, all of you, as an expression of solidarity with the God of Divine Welcome. God shows no partiality. Jesus died and rose for all. His love knows no bounds. Halleluiah!

Amen.