

SERMON: "UPENDING THE STATUS QUO"
TEXTS: NEW TESTAMENT ACTS 10:34-43
NEW TESTAMENT MATTHEW 28:1-10

April 5, 2026
Easter Sunday

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INTRODUCTION

I've often talked about Palm Sunday as a parade, lots of preachers have
That parade was interrupted, temporarily halted, last week.
Maybe you saw the news stories. Israeli authorities stopped a procession
by Catholic and Orthodox church leaders on the way to Christianity's holiest site,
the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in the Old City of Jerusalem, where Jesus
is traditionally said to have been crucified and buried

They did so for security reasons. During this war, the holy sites in Jerusalem and
Bethlehem have been closed or have had restrictions on how many people can visit
For Jews, only 50 worshippers a day at the Western Wall. For Muslims,
no visitors to the Al Aqsa mosque. For Christians, no Palm Sunday parade.
They are afraid these holy sites may be targeted as this war with Iran rages on

If you read the stories, you know the Palm Sunday parade was only temporarily halted
The Israeli government heard the complaints of church and political leaders
including a few US senators. The parade went on as planned as it has for decades.
I'd take that as a victory of sorts. Good news. It is a return to normal in a way,
a return to the status quo.

War won't stop Palm Sunday or Passover. Or Easter.
That could preach. Preachers are always looking for material.

The news stories got me thinking about faith and the status quo
In the middle of a war that doesn't seem to have an end in sight, an off ramp
I certainly can understand that longing for a return to the status quo
The way it once was (even just a few months ago) looks pretty darn good
compared to what it is now and to what it might be in the days ahead

But is that the good news we long to hear, need to hear? A return to the status quo?
The Easter story is certainly good news. It is certainly much more than nostalgia,
So much more than a look back, a return to the way things were back when.
Matthew is intentionally disruptive in the way he tells the story.

**After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary
Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. 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 clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook
and became like dead men.**

A SEISMIC SHIFT

Matthew uses the Greek word 'seismos' from which we get 'seismic' three times in the story of Jesus' last week - one on Palm Sunday when he talks about the city being in turmoil, two when the earth shakes as Jesus is crucified, and three here with the Easter story when suddenly there was a great earthquake. Three earthquakes in one week. Talk about earth-shaking news.

Along with the earthquakes, Matthew adds an angel who comes and not only rolls away the large stone but sits on it like he is pulling up a chair. Power on full display And the soldiers who represent the full power of Rome, Hail Ceasar! they shake and become like dead men. So much for the might of Rome.

I like the way Matt Skinner of Luther Seminary in St. Paul describes it

Matthew presents the resurrection of Jesus as an earthshaking occurrence. The event itself and evidently also its consequences are literally seismic. Nothing is ever certain during an earthquake. Nothing is stable. Everything totters. Each Gospel depicts the first Easter in its own way. For the other three, resurrection brings confusion, reunion, disbelief, and wonder. For Matthew, it's primarily a triumph. God unleashes power.

The guards are overwhelmed. The seal that represented imperial authority over the tomb snaps apart; it's no more a deterrent than flimsy yellow tape guarding an old crime scene. The angel cares nothing about the legal repercussions of breaking open the threshold.

That is Easter. Seismic is scope. God's power on full display. A triumph! It was then. I think we're comfortable with that. As post-modern people, we're skeptical of miracles (we look for other explanations / possibilities) But the power of Easter, the victory that Jesus' has over death That we see and claim. It happened ... And that changed everything

But what about Easter now? Is it still seismic for us today? Or is it status quo? Status quo as in back to normal, back to what we know?

Having been to the Old City of Jerusalem twice before, I learned how the status quo takes on a more particular, more local meaning there. Status quo is a Latin term meaning literally 'the state in which' Which then leads to it understood as 'the existing state of affairs' as in how things are versus how they might be if something were to change

But in the Holy Lands, the term 'status quo' is regularly used to talk about how the religious sites of the area (the holiest sites in Judaism and Christianity, and the third holiest in Islam) are managed – who has charge of what, where and when These legal agreements date back to the Ottoman Empire and the mid 1700's through world wars and the establishment of the modern state of Israel in 1948

SEISMIC STILL

As you may know or might imagine, people of faith have been arguing about who has that authority and how that authority is used

And I'm not just talking interfaith discussions and debates. The Christians who 'share management' of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre have argued so much amongst themselves that none of them has a key to the church. A Muslim family for 100 plus years now has unlocked and locked the church every day. They have the keys, not the Christians. That is the status quo.

The way I see the world, and how I hear the Easter story, pushes me past the status quo, past acting like I can or we can somehow manage holy sites or worse, holiness itself, past the relative comfort of the equilibrium way past what we are used to, what we can manage

I don't mean to talk bad about the status quo and/or the relative comfort of at least knowing how things work around here. We all carve out a spot where we might fit in and flow with the current. But isn't our faith more than that kind of comfort, the comfort of the familiar, a return to the good old days? Isn't Easter better understood as an earth-shaking interruption?

Easter is the word 'but' and how it changes what has been said before.

But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you."

The Easter message is earth-shaking, "Do not be afraid" world-changing good news. Death was the status quo. Not anymore.

I like the way the poet, Ann Weems, puts it into words, in her poem "Amazed."

*The people who heard Jesus were repeatedly amazed.
Are we today so sophisticated that we are immune to amazement?
Can we know that he was crucified –
 goodness, compassion and love nailed upon a tree,
 and go about our business of preparing Easter dinner?
Can we know that he arose from the dead
 and walked the earth, and ate and spoke with his followers
 and sit unamazed in the pew as though we cannot hear
 the word of God!
O God of Jesus the Christ, the amazing thing
 is our lack of amazement in the face of your Amazing Amen!*
Ann Weems, Kneeling in Jerusalem

SUMMARY

Amen about amazement, Ann.

I pray we have eyes to see stones rolled away with angels sitting on them

I pray we have feet that can feel the ground shifting and shaking beneath me

I pray we have courage to walk past the soldiers and symbols of the Romes
of today who flex their muscles but who now in the light of your death-defeating
glory like Matthew says 'shake and become like dead men.'

Dear God, let our status quo be open to God-given seismic shifts