

Matthew 28:1-10 - Still Fighting? Why? He is Risen!

Angels are not in the habit of sitting around. Whenever you hear of angels in the Scriptures, they are most often moving. Either bringing messages from God, standing at the ready to guard and protect us, or fighting the old, evil foe. Sitting around is just not in their job description.

So today, when we heard of an angel sitting, it's significant. Sure, he is bringing a message from God. And sure, first, he acted, rolling away the stone from Jesus' now-empty grave. But then, Matthew tells us, he sat on [that stone]. He sat on it. He stops standing, moving, fighting. He sat on it. Which is, I think, a seemingly insignificant detail filled with great significance.

For he sits for this reason: the fighting, the battle is over. Look at the soldier guards, how strong they look now, **trembling** in fear and struck down **like dead men**. The fighting, the battle is over! The fight of the cross, the crushing wages of sin, the terror of death, and the battle against Satan, is done. It's over. There is a victor. The One who is no longer in the grave. The angel can rest. He sits down. Signaling with this deed the good news he is also proclaiming this day.

And his good news is this: **Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.**

So first off, two things. First, **do not be afraid**. Do not fear the Romans. Do not fear the Jews. Do not fear death and the grave. Do not fear the guilt of your sin. They have done their worst to Jesus, but He has defeated them. They could not hold Him down. Yes, you saw Him die ... but now look! He is up. He is risen. As He said. As He taught His disciples. As He said through the whole Old Testament. The prophet greater than Moses has provided an even greater exodus from the sin that has enslaved you. The Son of David has slain the even greater Goliath that has been threatening you, the one named death and hell. **So do not be afraid!** Instead, rejoice!

That was the first good news of the angel. And the women did ... sort of. **They departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy.**

Now, Matthew doesn't tell us but the other evangelists do, that the women had gone to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus; to properly take care of the body for its burial. What had been done in haste on Friday, to get Jesus down from the cross and into the tomb before the Passover started at sundown, would now, after the Sabbath is over, be done carefully and properly. Grim work.

But that's the second good news of the angel: there is no dead body of Jesus to anoint! The only body of Jesus there is is a living body, a body that was dead and is alive again. You see the stone, you see the guard, but a dead Jesus you do not see. **You will see Him**, the angel says. Alive. But no more grim work to be done here. And so the women quickly dropped their weapons and ran to tell the disciples.

Wait ... weapons? Matthew doesn't say anything about weapons. True enough. They had no spear or sword. But they were still fighting. The battle against death. As feeble as their efforts would be, they would do what they could with their spices and anoint the body of Jesus. So what the angel was telling them here was really: stop fighting! Or to put that in a question form: Why have you come to still fight a battle that has already been won?

And that's why the angel tells the women to go tell the disciples—for they were still fighting too. Fighting not with sword or spear, but with locks and hiding places. Fighting their guilt, fighting their fear, fighting their despair and unbelief. They, too, needed to know that they were still fighting a battle that had already been won. That Jesus is risen! Death is defeated and sin is forgiven. Satan has been stripped of his two most powerful and, really, his only two weapons: sin and death. If we need not worry about these, then what does he have left? What can he now do to us?

But there are still more that need to hear this, this good news. The women fighting death needed to hear it and the disciples fighting guilt and despair needed to hear it—but so do we. And we, too, need to be asked: Why are we still fighting the battle that has already been won?

Yes, why are we still fighting?

Why are we still fighting for honor, power, and position?

Why are we still fighting for the things of this world?

Why are we still fighting sin and guilt by locking it up in our hearts, hiding it, denying it, or trying to justify ourselves and what we've done instead of repenting?

Why are we still fighting not to serve others but to be served by them?

And why are we still afraid?

Why are we still afraid of laying down our lives for others?

Why are we still afraid of what others think of us, and so afraid of what they will say of us?

Why are we still afraid of confession?

Why are we still afraid of death?

And afraid, we pick up our weapons and fight.

We fight against each other. We fight against God. Why?

The good news for you today is that you need not fight anymore. Jesus has won the victory for you, a greater victory than all your fighting could achieve anyway! So rest and rejoice! In Him.

Rest and rejoice. For did you not hear what St. Paul said today? Why are you still fighting for your life here, when your life is hidden with Christ in God?

Your life is not something you can see or measure by worldly standards. You have a new life.

For **you have been raised with Christ**—that's baptismal talk. Just as Christ is risen and His tomb empty, so you too have been raised with Him to a new life. Your tomb as temporary as His.

And so, Paul says, **set your minds on the things that are above, not on things that are on earth**. Stop fighting the same old fight for the same old life and the same old stuff. That's not who you are anymore; that's not where your life is. Your life is in Christ.

And though you maybe cannot see that now ... maybe you look just the same as others, or maybe even worse or worse off ... and though maybe your life doesn't look very glorious now, **when Christ who is your life appears**, Paul says, **then you also will appear with him in glory**. Then we will see the reality. Then we will see the victory that has been ours all along.

Why are we still fighting the battle that has already been won? Jesus' resurrection has changed everything. Sit, rest, and rejoice in your Savior.

Rejoice. Did you know that word was in our reading today too? You probably missed it because the English used the word Greetings! But when Jesus met the women after they had left the tomb and were on their way to the disciples, that is what He said to them—not just: Hi! How ya' doing? But rejoice! Here I am, risen from the dead! Rejoice, I am alive! It is, in fact, the same word the angel Gabriel spoke to Jesus' mother Mary when Jesus was conceived. Rejoice! Why, then? Because God was fulfilling His promise of sending a Savior. And rejoice why, now? Because God has fulfilled His promise of saving us. So from the newly filled womb of Mary to the newly empty tomb, we have joy in Jesus and His work for us. The One who has come to fight for us, so that we can drop our weapons, lay down our arms, and rest in Him.

And then, we'll do as the women did: we'll depart **with fear and great joy**. Great joy that we need not fight anymore, yet still fearing not fighting in a world that knows only fighting. Still fighting the fear and guilt and despair that wells up from the sinful flesh that still clings to us. Still fearing our saber-rattling enemy who wants us to fear how powerful he wants us to think he still is.

But the empty tomb tells a different story. The truth of what we heard today: that **the Lord has triumphed gloriously! Christ has risen from the dead and all things are under his feet.** And then as Peter said: that **everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.** And where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation. There is joy and peace.

So why are you still fighting? Why are you still afraid?

For Christ is risen! Alleluia!