

INVITED TO BE AMAZED

Matthew 28:1-10
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Community Church, Congregational
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Christ is risen! **Christ is risen indeed!**

In an Easter letter this week, a friend wrote to me about her mother: “Toward the end of Mom’s life, as she was withdrawing into the twilight of forgetfulness, one of the delights we shared was walking through a public garden. On a sunny spring stroll, Mom exclaimed, “Oh, isn’t that beautiful!?” Her eye was captivated by electric blue blossoms crouched alongside the path. We paused and marveled at the delicate flowers broadcasting such intense color.

“As we walked on, not ten feet further along, Mom’s eye fell upon another patch of these same flowers, and again she exclaimed, “Look at that! Aren’t they lovely,” as if for the first time. And so, it continued along the way. Time and again, Mom saw these graceful flowers, each time as if for the first time, receiving them as the extraordinary gifts they were—God’s glory in living color!”

In those twilight years, my friend’s mom was constantly looking for something amazing, with the wondrous eyes of a child. Everything was new on those walks with her mother. Her mom was expecting the unexpected, as children so often do on a first adventure or a first visit to a new place. But most of us don’t walk around with that wondrous attitude of “expect the unexpected” or “wait for something amazing to happen!”

On that first Easter Sunday, they weren’t expecting something amazing. The women who had watched as Jesus suffered and died on the cross weren’t expecting to find anything but grief and a dead body.

Suddenly, an earthquake! An angel from heaven, shimmering like lightning, guards

frozen in terror, and then the angel speaks. “Do not be afraid!” The same words Mary and Joseph had heard when they learned they were expecting an unexpected child. “Do not be afraid!” The story has come full circle. The miracle birth has now become the miracle death. “He is not here! He is risen!” **He is risen indeed!**

And so, the women go into the tomb, see the emptiness, and then rush back to the disciples, prepared to share this amazing news. But now that their eyes are wide open, their awareness on full alert, they see him – Jesus in their midst. The Risen Christ is right there, calling to them: “Greetings! Do not be afraid.” And then, the first commission from the Risen Christ: “Go and tell my brothers!” And so, the women go, in amazement and wonder.... Telling the disciples that something amazing has happened. He is risen! **He is risen indeed!**

Every gospel tells an amazing Easter story, each one a little differently, each one with a different series of resurrection appearances. In Matthew, there are only two – this Easter morning appearance to the women and a later appearance to the men in Galilee. Each one follows the same pattern, with a similar invitation to be amazed and invite other to be amazed. There’s a rhythm to the Easter stories of Matthew’s Gospel. First, the women are invited to amazement by a messenger. Awakened by the messenger, they see Jesus and worship and honor him in their awe and amazement. And then, they are sent to invite others to be amazed with news of the Risen Christ. Later the men will do the same: First, the men will be invited to amazement by the women messengers, bringing news of an empty tomb. Alerted by the women, the men will see Jesus and worship and honor him in their awe and amazement. And then, they are sent to invite others to amazement with the message of the Risen Christ. The Easter story invites us to be amazed.

When was the last time you were amazed? Perhaps when you held a newborn child? Or
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stared at a particularly colorful sunset? Or sat in the doctor's office and unexpectedly heard, "Remission. All is well." Or gazed into a lover's eyes and realized, "You are the one!" Those moments of amazement are often what fuel us through the humdrum days and troubled times. When the colicky newborn has awakened you one more time, the memory of that precious newborn smell somehow helps you through the long, sleepless night. When the fog rolls in and you can't hardly get out of bed for the morning gloom, the vision that another brilliant sunset that might break through by days' end can spur you on to face the day. When you feel run down and think, "Oh no, am I sick again," the doctor's reassuring words give you enough courage to call and ask for another check up. When your partner has irritated you to the edge of your temper, remembering that deep awareness of falling in love somehow allows you to laugh at the absurdity of yet another argument and even to forgive and move on.

Every year, people around the world recall that first Easter morning, a story so amazing that most people can hardly believe it. Even so, we read the scriptures, sing the songs, and proclaim Christ's resurrection. Christ is risen. **Christ is risen indeed!** We are invited to be amazed. We are invited to worship, in awe and amazement, a God who is so amazing that he wouldn't even let death stop the message of amazing love shown to us in Christ Jesus.

We are part of an amazing story. We are invited to share this amazing story, every time we share amazing love and grace with one another, every time we offer amazing love and grace with a stranger, every time we give amazing love and grace to ourselves. But sharing amazing love and grace takes fuel. That fuel comes when we experience God's presence all around us and even within us.

So, God invites us to notice the amazing miracles of God's loving presence and amazing grace each and every day.

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The amazing bloom of a California spring, emerging from drought.

The amazing miracle of a healthy child, growing up before our very eyes.

The amazing surprise of a long-sought-after dream, actually coming true.

The amazing gift of a family member, who loves you through thick and thin.

We might sometimes overlook the miracles God works in our lives or simply fail to notice the extraordinary blessings that God showers on us day by day. But when we remember that God *invites us* to be amazed, we open our eyes and notice the amazing gifts and miracles all around. When we remember that Christ calls us to approach the kingdom like little children, we open our minds to wonder and awe and notice those beautiful blue flowers on our path as miraculous gifts.

Accept the invitation to be amazed, and notice how often God lifts people out of discouragement. Notice the miracle of seeing God help a friend overcome their previous self-hatred. Accept the invitation to be amazed, and notice how often God lights the way even for people who are swept away into the darkness. The alcoholic who finds her way to an AA meeting, the indebted young father who finally calls his parents to help with the mortgage, and the frightened student who turns to a trusted teacher for guidance are all equally amazing. God offers a light, and somehow they see a way forward to a new beginning. Even in the face of death, God can light the way. A friend told me about one of her last conversations with her dying child: “Mom, he said,” through eyes bright with tears, “if we understood it fully, death would be a beautiful as birth.” It was his affirmation of faith, from the depths of despair at leaving his parents far too soon, that even death could not separate them from their love of one another and their love of God. Amazing grace, amazing love, in that special moment between parent and child.

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Accept the invitation to be amazed, and notice the wonder of people all around you. It's a Sunday morning, and there are people here in church to worship God, love one another, and share in fellowship and discipleship as we grow closer to God and one another. Take a look at the crowd at Easter brunch today, or Starbucks or Zinc any day, and notice the miracle of people connecting and caring, conversing and sharing.

Accept the invitation to be amazed, and discover how God can light your way even when you're simply stuck in the mundane, the busy-ness, and the routine of just getting through each and every day. Even then, God invites us to be amazed. When the predictability of life or the disappointments start to wear you down, go for a walk and look for a new bloom of flowers along the path. Rest at your desk and think about something you love in your work. Close your eyes, and bring to your mind the person whom you cherish most. Reflect on the past day, and see where God might have been present along the way. Look back on your year, and give thanks for the miracles of love and grace you encountered.

The women might have just walked away from an empty tomb, confused and bewildered. They might not have looked up in their grief and noticed a stranger standing there; they might have walked past the Risen Christ, blinded by their tears and anguish. But an earthquake and an angel came first to wake them up from their sorrow, to lift up their sorrowful hearts, to open their eyes to new possibilities, and then invited them to be amazed: "He is not here! He is risen!" **He is risen indeed!**

Easter is an invitation to all of us: "He is not here! He is risen!" **He is risen indeed!** Christ is not stuck in a church building or a dusty Bible on your bookshelf. Christ is everywhere, in the world, in our very midst. Christ is not stuck in an ancient story or the lives of disciples long past. Christ is in your story, in your lives, in your love and your grace, in your service and
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discipleship in the world. Lift up your hearts. Lift up your eyes, and accept the invitation to be amazed. Wonder is all around. New life is all around. Resurrection is real, if only we wake up and pay attention to all the invitations to be amazed.

My friend closed out her letter: “Mom’s memory loss gave her the gift of fresh awareness. She wasn’t laden with a tired seen-one-seen-‘em-all attitude. Rather she was delighted to discover the miracle of new life time and again anew.

“Though she died nearly seven years ago, my heart burns within me every time I see bright blue flowers tucked into the rocks along a garden path. Mom is very near. Jesus lives. And loves never ends.”

Lift up your hearts, open your eyes: Christ is risen. **Christ is risen indeed!**

Let us pray.

Risen Christ, rise in our hearts this day.

Open the eyes of our souls to see you in every person,
to notice new life as it arises,
and to recognize miracles all around.
We’re ready to be amazed with your amazing grace,
constant presence, and astound love. Amen.

I invite you to join me as we pray the Lord’s Prayer together, which you’ll find on the back cover of your worship handout.

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power,
and the glory forever. Amen.
Amen.