

What Is Jesus Doing?

Matthew 28:1-10

In their Easter preparation work in Sunday School, the teacher asked each student, "What does Easter mean to you?" There were the typical answers you'd expect: "Easter means Jesus is alive", and "Easter means "Victory over death". Johnny, who always sat in the back of the class, said: "Easter means egg-salad sandwiches for the next two weeks." Okay, it was a bad answer. But it was a good question.

What does Easter mean to you? Better yet, how does Easter change your life? Is Easter something more than an opportunity for a new spring outfit, a family dinner, and an excuse to bite the heads off all those annoying little purple and pink marshmallow Peeps?

Easter is the highest point in the Christian year. I think it's more important than Christmas. And the weekend after Easter is the lowest. In fact, many call next Sunday "Low Sunday". After such a high in our lives, (the bonnets and bunnies, new life symbolized in flowers and butterflies, singing the magnificent Messiah), there is what behavioral scientists call a post-reinforcement pause.

Which is to say that after such an extraordinarily elevated experience, next Sunday when we return to "normal", the ordinary seems rather low.

But if the church is really serious about God's resurrection activity, there can be no low Sundays—ever. Because week after week we proclaim the good news that Christ is risen. Easter Sunday isn't the end of the Church's high holy days. It's just the beginning.

In our text this morning from Matthew, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary make their way back to Jesus' tomb just as dawn breaks on Sunday morning. These women stayed close by Jesus as he suffered and died on the cross. They watched Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus take Jesus' body, anoint him spices, wrap him in a linen burial shroud, and place him in the tomb. They witnessed the stone as it was rolled in front of the tomb entrance and settled into place.

As Jesus' friends and loyal followers, they stayed, they watched, they witnessed. But there was one last, holy duty to perform. They needed to mourn him. But the Sabbath was creeping in on them even as Nicodemus and Joseph hurried to get Jesus' body safely entombed before sunset.

The women, although they remained as long as they could, had to get back to their homes, their families, to prepare for and observe the Sabbath. Their mourning for their master and teacher had to be put on hold until the Sabbath, with all its obligations and restrictions, had passed.

And when it had, at dawn, the women could not and would not wait any longer. They hurried towards the tomb in order to sit *shiva* – which means "seven", and which is seven days of mourning with specific guidelines.¹ It was the last thing they could do for Jesus.

But instead of a quiet tomb the women get...

- an earthquake!
- a dazzlingly radiant angel of the Lord!
- a miraculous pronouncement!
- an empty tomb!

With one swift glance inside that barren cavern, the women's agenda for the day, for their lifetime, was instantly changed. No longer was this a time for mourning. No longer was this an ending. This was a new beginning in a whole new world.

- where resurrection is a reality.
- where death has been destroyed.
- where Jesus lives forever.

A few years ago there was a popular initial craze. Not an initial craze as in the start of something, but a craze that was started because of initials. It was plastered on bracelets and pins and shirts and bumper stickers: "W.W.J.D." "What Would Jesus Do?" The point was for Christians to look at and consider the issues, problems, decisions facing them and to ask, under these circumstances, "What would Jesus do?"

The problem I have with W.W.J.D is that it is presented in the wrong voice. It's the question you'd ask of a dead person. Asking "what would Jesus do" imagines that Jesus is no longer a player. That Jesus' activity was in the past and so the question is asked in the past tense. Which puts all present and future decisions on our own frail shoulders.

By putting Jesus in the past tense - "W.W.J.D" - forgets about Easter.

Easter puts Jesus in our midst - yesterday, today, tomorrow. In fact, forever. People who understand the life-breathing power of Easter never ask "W.W.J.D." (What would Jesus *do*) but rather "W.I.J.D."—(What *Is* Jesus Doing?)

"What would Jesus do" is the question a mourner asks, trying to preserve the memory of a loved one who is dead and gone. What would Jesus do is a question the two Mary's might have asked during *shiva*.

Instead they see and hear the miracle of the resurrection.

Instead they run to tell the disciples and run smack into Jesus himself.

Instead of staying stuck in the past, they begin to look to the future.

"What is Jesus doing?" begs us to get out of our empty tombs and tell others about a future with Him. "What is Jesus doing?" puts us on the road to Galilee where we experience a new beginning and continue the mission of the Messiah.

Easter is not about preserving the memory of a dead person. It's not about mourning and remembering the life and works of Jesus. If that were all Easter had to offer, there are a lot better ways we could spend this Sunday.

Easter proclaims Christ is Risen, not two thousand years ago, but this morning, today, and all of tomorrow. We live in the power of Christ's resurrection. Christ alive and moving forward, not dead and still hanging on a cross.

Not what would Jesus do back then, but "What is Jesus Doing" today, here, among us on this Easter Sunday.

- What is Jesus Doing. in this church?
- What is Jesus Doing. In your life?
- What is Jesus Doing. In your community?
- What is Jesus Doing. In your school?
- What is Jesus Doing. In your family?
- What is Jesus Doing. In Afghanistan?
- What is Jesus Doing. In Jerusalem?
- What is Jesus Doing. In Washington, D.C.?
- What is Jesus Doing. In your wallet?
- What is Jesus Doing. In your heart?

¹ <http://www.jewfaq.org/death.htm>