

Pastor Joe Polzin  
 Matthew 28:1-10  
 “Shattering the Silence”

Year A – The Resurrection of Our Lord – Easter Sunday  
 April 12, 2020

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and our risen Lord Jesus Christ!

**Amen.** Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

I’m sure you’ve heard the term “deafening silence” before, haven’t you? It can refer to a silence, or lack of response, because people may be unenthused or disapproving of something that was just said. Like, “The boss’ suggestion to work through the holidays was met with deafening silence.” That’s one meaning. But another meaning is when it refers to a period of silence that follows a great cacophony of noise, like the volume dial that was turned all way up, and then immediately all the way down. That sudden quietness is also referred to as a “deafening silence.”

Now, that’s an interesting expression, isn’t it? Objectively, there is no difference between one moment of silence and another; silence is simply the absence of noise. But there is a difference when it comes to how our brains perceive that silence. When you hear the difference in dynamics between a great noise and then a sudden silence, your brain goes through a process that’s called “adaptation.” That’s the momentary lag as your mind processes the drastic difference it just perceived. It’s what your ears think they’re hearing after the great crescendo of an orchestra that’s all of a sudden come to full stop. And this experience can make that “deafening silence” sound even more profound than it actually is.

All this came to my mind the past few days when we heard the account of Jesus’ crucifixion and burial. Think about all that noise we heard on Good Friday when those hammer blows nailed Jesus to the cross, “those who passed by derided him” (Matt. 27:39), “Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying... ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” (27:46), “Jesus cried out again with a loud voice” when he “yielded up his spirit” (27:50), “the curtain of the temple was torn in two,” “the earth shook, and the rocks were split,” “tombs also were opened” (27:51-52), there was an earthquake, and finally the centurion called out, “Truly this was the Son of God!” (27:54) The volume dial was certainly turned all the way up as all of creation reacted to God in the flesh being crucified and killed on that dark and noisy day.

But then... there was a *deafening silence*, a *profound quiet*, as Jesus’ body was laid in a stone tomb and was lifeless for three days. The disciples of Jesus must have really struggled in that silence, as it enveloped, overwhelmed, and crushed them. Their Lord and Savior was *dead*. And it meant that they, who had staked their entire lives on Jesus, were dead, too.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we are all too familiar with deafening silences in our own lives, as well. They are the moments when everything had been going along alright, and then in a cacophony of noise, our lives get flipped upside down, and chaos ensues. The diagnosis update from our doctor. The news that you’re about to lose a loved one. The frantic, fast-paced reactions. The yelling and screaming at home. The crying and sobbing at night. The volume gets turned all the way up, but then... a *deafening silence*, as your life comes crashing down. The silence you hear after the doctor’s visit, or after the argument, or after the funeral. And that silence can just seem to envelope, overwhelm, and crush you.

Think back exactly one month ago. One month ago our lives were at the normal height of noise that was our standard American living. I know for me, our household was as busy as ever, with kids and school and activities. My work was jam-packed, I had meetings, and sermons, and visits to get done. At church, we had events and meals and services humming along. I'm sure things in your life were very much the same, as the volume in our lives was turned all the way up.

And then, seemingly overnight, everything changed. The world came to a screeching halt with the reality of this pandemic sinking in. Our lives just stopped. And what we were met with was a deafening silence. Schools, and stores, and streets, and even churches, stood empty, even in the most important Holy Week of the year. For some, like frontline workers, they had to go right back into the fray, with a new reality for what their life was like. But for many others, this silence is starting to seem like it's to enveloping, overwhelming, and crushing us. And the worst part is, most people say, is they don't know when it's going to end.

On that first Easter morning, our Gospel Reading tells us that there were only two women, walking to the tomb at dawn: Mary Magdalene and, as Matthew calls her, "the other Mary," who was probably the mother of James and Joseph, a person mentioned just a chapter before. These women were walking to the tomb, walking in the quietness of the morning and in the deafening silence that still lingered from Friday, in order to finish preparing Jesus' body for his burial. They were likely still reeling with their sadness, unsure of what to do after they finished this somber task.

But that's when everything changed. The silence of the morning was shattered with another earthquake, and an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, and he rolled back the stone, and sat on it (28:2). Matthew says, "His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow" (28:3). The guards whom Pilate posted were so terrified, they fell down like dead men, while the angel said to the women, "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. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you" (28:5-7).

And as if that wasn't stunning and exciting enough, while they were running from the tomb with a mixture of "fear and great joy," Matthew says, all of sudden Jesus met them on the way, and said, "Greetings!" And they fell at his feet, and they grabbed on to him, and they worshiped him. Can you even imagine? And Jesus reiterated what the angel just had told them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me" (28:9-10).

The deafening silence which followed Christ's death, when all hope, faith, and life seemed to be lost, when the disciples had acted like anything but Christ's brothers as they abandoned him in fear, all of that was shattered on Easter morning by Jesus' resurrection, and the Gospel proclamation that he is alive, just as he said he would be. And Jesus himself brings this good news to the women. He cuts through their sorrow and their fear, and reassures them that he is truly back from the dead, and that he wants to see all his disciples, his brothers, face to face.

That is the true joy of Easter, that after we experience the unsettling noise of our Savior's death, after he offers himself as the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, including yours and mine, and then after that profound and reverberating silence that ends our Good Friday service every year, we come to Easter Sunday, when once again that silence is shattered. But not with the noise of chaos, and sorrow, and weeping, but with the joyful proclamation that Jesus is alive! He has overcome the condemnation for our sin! He has defeated death and its stranglehold on us!

He has won the victory over everything in this world that might try to envelope, overwhelm, or crush us!

That is the good news of Jesus' resurrection that we celebrate here today. You see, Easter changes everything for us. It wasn't just a happy ending to a story from a long time ago. It is the ending to *our* story, as well. Jesus' resurrection extends all the way forward into our lives today and it shatters the silence that would seek to crush us. Jesus is alive, in both body and soul, he was raised from the dead. And that means that his sacrifice for your sins was accepted by the Father. You are forgiven, and now you are given the newness of life. And what's more, because he was raised, you know that you too will be raised in both body and soul on the Last Day. The day when Jesus will call you out of your grave, and welcome you into his everlasting kingdom of life, the day when he makes the heavens and the earth new again.

To be sure, we will still experience moments of deafening silence in our lives today. But what the resurrection of Jesus shows us is that these moments are only temporary. When you are weak, your risen Lord is with you and will strengthen you. When you are broken, your risen Lord will heal you with his love. When you are sick, your risen Lord will give you his perfect healing of both body and soul. And when you are dying, your risen Lord will comfort you with his eternal peace.

And when our churches stand silent for a time, like during this global crisis, be assured, the day will come when the joyful noise and praise of God's people will fill this building again. And in the meantime, we know the Church is *not* a building, but is God's people. And *we* are not silent. Not today. Today, we share the good news that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is alive! And because he lives, we will live also.

In those moments of deafening silence in your life, moments filled with sorrow, and difficulty, and hardship, know this: that your Lord and Savior comes to you, he greets you on the road, calls you his brother or sister, and points you forward to your certain future with him, where he promises that you will see him face to face. The future where you know you will appear with him in glory. The future where, though things may have been silent for a time, though even your own body may have given way to the silence of death, Christ will shatter that silence with the joyful noise of eternal life.

We will live with the one who lives forever. We will assemble as the multitude of saints, alive in both body and soul, gathered around his throne with each other, worshiping the one whose blood has washed away our sin, and whose life has made us alive. The silence of sin and death will be no more, and ringing out through all eternity will be the joyful proclamation of Jesus, the Lamb who was slain, who is now alive, and has begun his reign. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! In his name. **Amen.**

And now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, our risen Lord. **Amen.**