

Surprise! Jesus Always Arrives First Matthew 28:1-10 (below from *The Message*)
 Saint Marks UMC, Charleston WV. EASTER SUNDAY (April 20) 2014

¹⁻⁴ After the Sabbath, as the first light of the new week dawned, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to keep vigil at the tomb. Suddenly the earth reeled and rocked under their feet as God's angel came down from heaven, came right up to where they were standing. He rolled back the stone and then sat on it. Shafts of lightning blazed from him. His garments shimmered snow-white. The guards at the tomb were scared to death. They were so frightened, they couldn't move.

⁵⁻⁶ The angel spoke to the women: "There is nothing to fear here. I know you're looking for Jesus, the One they nailed to the cross. He is not here. He was raised, just as he said. Come and look at the place where he was placed.

⁷ "Now, get on your way quickly and tell his disciples, 'He is risen from the dead. **He is going on ahead of you** to Galilee. You will see him there.' **That's the message.**"

⁸⁻¹⁰ The women, deep in wonder and full of joy, lost no time in leaving the tomb. They ran to tell the disciples. Then Jesus met them, stopping them in their tracks. "Good morning!" he said. They fell to their knees, embraced his feet, and worshiped him. Jesus said, "You're holding on to me for dear life! **Don't be frightened like that. Go tell my brothers that they are to go to Galilee, and that I'll meet them there.**"

A typical conversation of which I have personal knowledge:

Monty: Hey, Jesus, follow me over here, would you. I've got a situation.

Jesus Aren't you forgetting something, Monty? I called *you* (and all the disciples before you) to FOLLOW ME.

Monty Yeah, yeah. And I do, obviously. But, for once, let's not be so literal. I need you over here to deal with this situation that I've got.

Jesus OK. OK.

Monty You see, Jesus. This is a sticky wicket that I'm trying to deal with. I'm thinking that I could just ... Jesus, where are you?

(Jesus is far ahead of Monty, already down the road, AT the situation toward which Monty is headed, and which Monty was discussing.)

Monty (with a hint of frustration in his voice): Could you not just ...

Jesus Sorry, I took a short cut.

Monty No, you're not sorry. Not even a little bit.

Jesus You're right; I'm not sorry. I always arrive first. I'd have thought by now, you'd realize that. It's just the way We work. Can't be helped. You can never arrive at a situation ahead of me. Regardless of how hard you want me to follow you. I always arrive first.

That's the powerful message of the Matthew EASTER GOSPEL TEXT. Verse 7 says so: "Now, get on your way quickly and tell his disciples, 'He is risen from the dead. **He is going on ahead of you** to Galilee. You will see him there.' **That's the message.**"

1. There are times when I try to get ahead of Jesus. Times when I've got an idea in my head, and I don't really want to take time to talk to Jesus about it. I just want to get on with MY IDEA, and I'd like for Jesus to watch my back side, and please keep his opinions to himself.

NOPE! Jesus is never content to play back seat passenger. Jesus always arrives first.

2. There are other times when it seems like I'm in over my head.

"I didn't ask for this situation. I didn't bring this on myself. It's not fair what's going on. It's not fair at all, and I just can't figure it out. What's Jesus thinking about anyhow? How can I (or the person I love) be expected to deal with this? If Jesus really loves me, he wouldn't allow me (or my loved one) to go through this!

"Dagnabit! Jesus! Stop it. Right now! If you don't change things pretty soon, I'm not going to be responsible for what I might do. I don't feel much love right now ... not much love at all.

“Hello! Are you listening?”

Yep, even here, Jesus goes on before us. Do you remember Jesus going before us and saying:

“And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, ‘**My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me;...**’” Matthew 26:39

And then, on the very next day:

“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ... ‘**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**’” Matthew 27:46

You ever get frustrated with God? You ever feel like God has let you down?

Yeah, Jesus has gone down that road ahead of you, also. Don’t feel so bad about feeling that way. Jesus has done it, too.

3. That means that Jesus understands. Did you see how in today’s Gospel message, even though the women bowed down at Jesus’ feet and worshipped him, **HE UNDERSTOOD THAT THEY WERE NONETHELESS AFRAID.**

Emotions don’t respond to, nor are they controlled by logic, or clear thinking.

Holy Jesus! They should have been singing and dancing! Once he was dead; how he is alive! Yeah! That would have made sense.

But, as much sense as it made, they were nonetheless afraid. And Jesus understood. And told them, **“It’s OK.”**

We fall down.

Jesus arrives first; he has been there.

We get up.

Jesus arrives first; he has been there.

We are afraid.

Jesus arrives first; he has been there.

We sometimes just can't seem to help ourselves; we find ourselves just crying for no particular reason at all.

Jesus arrives first; he has been there [Remember Jesus at Lazarus' tomb? Even though he knows he's going to raise Lazarus from the dead, he nonetheless weeps.]

Sometimes, it seems like things just keep piling up. It's been a hard year for many of us here at Saint Marks. Right now, on my prayer list, I have the names of more than 35 people diagnosed with cancer. Some of them you don't know yet. It hits us hard; those who are diagnoses; those in the family; those in the congregation. Sometimes it feels like maybe we just love too much, because there's just so much pain ... it just doesn't make sense.

Jesus arrives first; he has been there. He understands.

When I can't provide the answer for situations, there's one thing I know: Our God, Whose only Son went through the crucifixion and death, in order that our lives will be saved from death ... our God is a powerful God, NOT just because he saves, not just because he overcomes death ... but BECAUSE HE CHOOSES TO SUFFER WITH US.

And there's no situation we ever encounter, that Jesus has not arrived first. We don't have to understand. We don't have to comprehend. We don't even have to feel that God is with us in the moment, any more than Jesus did when he said, "**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.**"

And in our very worst moments ... Jesus arrives first. And he is there with us.

Poet David Ballard expresses it like this:

Whenever I thirst Jesus arrives first.
 With a steady hand, He wipes the sand
 From my lips and dips
 A ladle in a cup,
 Brimming with water.
 Moving the ladle over the surface,
 He skims away my glassy image.

Now, I am no longer a hero:
 My image breaking and rippling
 With the surface of the water, turning
 Into ever-expanding zeroes,
 Reminding me of the nothing that I am
 Without Him. Then, the Holy Spirit
 Moves over me,
 And I calm with the surface of the water.

Slowly, in the stillness of His creation,
 The image of my Father appears.
 In wonder: for the life of me, I cant remember
 An image of kindness and love: so tender.
 I am struck dumb, drinking my fill
 Of the living water and feel the chill
 Inside me
 Of eternity.

By David W. Ballard <http://davidwballard.com/2011/02/17/untitled/>

Today we rejoice and celebrate, because of the SURPRISE OF
 EASTER.

Other days, all we can do is just try to hold on.

And, on all those days -- even on those days when we try to run ahead of Jesus -- guess what? He always knows a short cut. He always arrives first.

On your very worst day, just hold onto that.

Alleluia! Christ is risen. **Risen indeed!**

And so, too, will we. Because Jesus arrives first, for us to follow.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.