

# *“Celebrating the Resurrection in Galilee!”*

## **A Sermon for Easter Sunday**

**Preached by Pastor Rob Fulton**

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**First United Presbyterian Church  
Bellefontaine, Ohio**

Now, if ever there was a day for JOY and REJOICING in the life of the church, then EASTER is surely it! What a GLORIOUS day Easter is! More than any other day in the life of God’s people of faith, is a day to REJOICE and CELEBRATE and to SING *“Alleluia!”* with all joy and gusto we can muster. The event of Easter morning – Christ’s resurrection from the dead – is, according to the Apostle Paul, THE seminal event in our life as Christians – not Jesus’ miracles... not Jesus’ “virgin birth”...not EVEN the event of Christ’s coming into our world - which we call Christmas (Paul never even MENTIONS Jesus birth in Bethlehem) – but Easter! Easter is the REASON for our faith! And as such, it is THE most important thing we have to celebrate as followers of him who was dead but now lives and offers life to all who follow him. So SING and CELEBRATE! REJOICE and GIVE THANKS! The Lord is RISEN! He is RISEN INDEED!

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But let me ask you something. Have you ever noticed in the Easter story that the people who first encountered the Risen Lord didn’t do a lot of CELEBRATING there at the empty tomb? A little bit ago, we read from Matthew’s story of that first Easter morning and in it, there was far more FEAR than there was CELEBRATION. *“You must not be AFRAID!”*, the angel told the women who first discovered the empty tomb. *“I know you’re looking for Jesus who was crucified. But he is not here! He has been raised, just as he said he would be. Come and see the place where he was lying! Now go quickly and tell his disciples!”*

*“So the women left the tomb in a hurry, AFRAID, yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.”*

And it’s the same way in the other three gospels as well. The original ending of Mark’s gospel has the women SO afraid...so DISTRESSED and TERRIFIED...that they said nothing to anyone, because they were AFRAID. No CELEBRATION – only FEAR!

In Luke’s gospel, when the women found the tomb empty that first Easter morning, they were PUZZLED, we’re told...until, that is two men dressed in dazzlingly white attire (a sure indication that they were angels!) appeared before them. And then they were AFRAID...FULL OF FEAR, Luke tells us...and bowed down to the ground. When those two messengers told the women what had happened...that Jesus had, in fact, been raised from the

dead...there STILL wasn't a lot of celebration. The women didn't start singing and shouting and dancing around to the strains of the *Hallelujah Chorus!* On the contrary, they simply left the empty tomb and went to tell the disciples...who, by the way, thought what the women told them was just another of those "idle tales" that women always tell and refused to believe them.

Only in JOHN'S gospel...which is the LAST of the Gospels written...some 30 years AFTER Mark's original telling of the tale...is there even a HINT of celebration...and that comes only AFTER Mary cries her eyes out because she thinks someone has come and stolen Jesus' body away. Upon seeing the gardener (or so she THINKS) she says to him, "*Oh sir, if you have taken his body away, please tell me where he is so that I can go and get him..*" But then the gardener, who is in fact Jesus, says to her "*Mary!*" And at the sound of that familiar voice calling her name, she recognizes who he is and calls out, in what we take to be a cry of joy and celebration, "*Rabboni!*" which means "Teacher."

But that's it! In all four of the Gospels, there is precious LITTLE celebrating of this event WE believe to be the GREATEST reason to celebrate that we have as Christians. So WHY? WHAT GIVES? Why didn't those first Easter morning believers strike up the band...or throw a party...or sing and shout Hallelujah when they realized Jesus was alive? Why didn't they have

everyone gather in the garden and celebrate in that place where Jesus was raised from the dead? That would be the appropriate reaction, right? That would be the right thing to do, wouldn't you think? Well, maybe...but maybe NOT! And here's why!

First of all, you've got to realize that we, today, on this glorious Easter morning, have had nearly 2,000 year of thinking and pondering and understanding and celebrating what Christ's resurrection from the dead. We KNOW what Christ being alive means for our lives! Those first followers of Jesus, however...those first people to encounter that empty tomb...didn't yet have a CLUE what Jesus resurrection from the dead meant for their lives. Even though Jesus had tried, on numerous occasions, to TELL them what was going to happen to him, they STILL didn't have ANY IDEA how important...how significant...how absolutely CRUCIAL the empty tomb would be for both their EARTHLY lives as well as their ETERNAL lives. That would be something they would have to LEARN...in the MIDST of their everyday living.

Which is PRECISELY why Jesus told the women at the tomb to go and tell his disciples to go to GALILEE and THERE they would see him. THERE they would begin to understand. THERE...in Galilee...they would learn how important...how significant...how ABSOLUTELY CRUCIAL Christ's resurrection would be...not only for JESUS...but for themselves and their own lives as well. "*Go quickly and tell my disciples, 'He has been raised from*

*death, and is going ahead of you into Galilee; and THERE you will see him!”*

But GALILEE? Why did Jesus tell the disciples to go to GALILEE rather than having them celebrate the resurrection at the empty tomb in Jerusalem? JERUSALEM is where it all took place, didn't it? JERUSALEM is what's important, isn't it? Oh, you'd THINK so. But Jesus had something else in mind!

Jesus told his disciples to go to GALILEE, good friends, precisely because GALILEE is where they FROM! GALILEE is where they LIVED! GALILEE is where they WORKED! GALILEE is where they KNEW LIFE! And GALILEE, where they lived and worked and knew life, is also where they would come to know and understand and ultimately CELEBRATE the meaning of Christ's resurrection in their lives. In other words, Jesus told the women to tell the disciples to GO HOME to Galilee so that they could discover and celebrate and LIVE the joy of the resurrection in the MIDST of their everyday lives...in GALILEE.

To be sure, we gather here today, on Easter 2011, for what is surely a day of JOY and REJOICING...CELEBRATION and PRAISE! And what a WONDERFUL, GLORIOUS day this is!

But in reality, this morning...this hour of worship...as fine and joyous and glorious as it may be...is NOT what Easter is all about. NOR is this place...this sanctuary...this House of God...where Easter REALLY takes

place. This PLACE...and our time together this morning...is only the time and the place where we, like those women who first encountered the empty tomb, hear the Good News message of Easter...the message that Christ is ALIVE... YES! But also the message that in order to UNDERSTAND Christ's resurrection...in order to GET IN TOUCH with Christ's resurrection...in order for Christ's resurrection to become REAL in OUR lives...we need to RETURN TO GALILEE...to go back to our homes...our work...our lives...with the knowledge and assurance that Christ IS alive and that it is in the MIDST of our everyday living we will ultimately begin to UNDERSTAND and CELEBRATE what that truly means.

I hope I can always remember something I heard the evangelist Billy Graham say a number of years ago in one of those "Saturday night before Easter" television specials. He said: *"How wonderful it would be if everyone who came to church on Easter morning really BELIEVED and LIVED as if Jesus was alive come MONDAY morning! What a CHANGE that would make in our world!"*

That, above all others, is the message I would leave you with this glorious Resurrection Day: CELEBRATE your Easter faith, for it is surely right to do so! Sing and celebrate! Rejoice and give thanks! But even as you celebrate TODAY, remember to CONTINUE celebrating TOMORROW when you return to the Galilees of YOUR life...CONTINUING to

celebrate...CONTINUING to live the reality that Jesus Christ IS alive...alive in YOUR life and in mine.

What a DIFFERENCE it would make if everybody who came to church on Easter Sunday TRULY BELIEVED Jesus is alive and lived their lives accordingly on Monday morning! What a DIFFERENCE it would make...a difference that comes ONLY when we celebrate the resurrection in the Galilees of our everyday living!

**ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA! AMEN!**

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