

Filled Full: The Empty Tomb and the Fullness of Life Matthew 28

Jesus says, “...*I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.*” – John 10:10b.

This story, this day, is all about that fullness. Today we’ll see that because the tomb is empty, we can be *Filled Full*. *Filled Full* of Joy, of Hope, of Assurance, of Purpose and of God’s very Presence. This starts with seeing the Seismic Shift – God’s shaking out the old and opening a new set of possibilities through Jesus’ resurrection.

The Seismic Shift of New Creation

“After the Sabbath, at dawn **on the first day of the week**, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.” – Matthew 28:1 (Emphasis Added)

That ‘**first day**’ language is meant to send our minds back to the very beginning of the Biblical story - to Genesis One.

And now, in this garden space, God is doing fresh work, beginning a ‘new creation.’ It’s signaled as the foundations of Creation are being ‘shaken.’ Just look at verses 2 & 3:

“There was a **violent earthquake [seismos...megas “mega shaking”]**, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow.” (Emphasis Added)

The earth shakes - True. This moment also signals that the very foundations of the old order of things – dominated by greed and violence, by selfishness – it’s all coming undone. This is the ‘undoing’ of the old order of things. The undoing of death itself.

The earth shakes; but that’s not all. Verse 4 says, “The guards were so afraid of him that **they shook [seismos]** and became **like dead men.**” (Emphasis Added)

Do you see the irony? Here, these ‘live men’ are guarding the grave of a dead man – Jesus; but then there’s the reversal. The One who was really and truly dead has been brought back to life; and now it’s the guards who become “...like dead men.”

Theme of “Shaken” through Matthew’s Gospel

- a) The city of Jerusalem was first ‘shaken up,’ was disturbed, at word of Jesus’ birth.
- b) The city of Jerusalem was shaken again at Jesus’ entry as the true King on Palm Sunday.
- c) Then this shaking becomes literally true at the cross (See Matthew 27:51-52a):

“At that moment [of Jesus’ death] the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The **earth shook [seismos]**, the rocks split, and the tombs broke open...”

- d) On the morning of Jesus’ resurrection, the greatest shaking of all. It’s not just shaken, but ‘*seismos...megas*’ - ‘**Mega shaken.**’

*“While the women were on their way, **some of the guards** went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened.”* (Emphasis Added)
Matthew 28:11

At least some of the guards, Matthew tells us, literally ‘buy into’ the deception. They, “...*shook and became like dead men...*,” and now they continue to participate – with the chief priests and elders – in the old order of things. The world of lies and deception, of corruption and greed. They stay locked in the way, not of life, but of ‘dead men.’

Matthew is showing us their response for at least **two reasons**:

1. To show where the false, counter-narrative about Jesus originates. It’s important to the early Christian community to counter the lies about Jesus because truth matters, and this is the reality that changes everything.

Take Home: part of the work of Christians is to counter false claims about Jesus and the Gospel. It’s a normal part of Christian life to be able to give cogent, helpful and truthful answers about why we can believe the news of Jesus’ resurrection - Because it’s true - Because it happened - and it changes everything (see 1 Peter 3:15-16).

2. Matthew is pressing us to ask ourselves if we, like these guards, are going to remain in lock-step with the old order of things, or like the women, embrace the new creation way of life?

Take Home: In Jesus’ resurrection, God is ‘shaking up’ and ‘shaking out’ the old order so we can be Filled Full with the new; with *His* life.

Old Order vs New Creation

A. Example

The Old Order Says: ‘You want to be loved? You need to earn it! You need to prove your worth.’

The New Creation says: The empty tomb reveals the emptiness of that logic. The new creation opens space for us to be filled with the love of God, poured into our hearts.

Paul says it like this in Galatians 2:20, “*The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, **who loved me and gave himself for me.***”

No more proving - No more earning - No more seeking approval based on the valuation system of the old order.

B. Example

The Old Order Says: ‘The way to greatness is through power; it is about domination - about control - about getting your way - about winning.’

The New Creation Says: Jesus’ resurrection is God’s great, “Yes!” to the way of humility, of self-giving for others. It’s God’s great, “Yes!” to the way of suffering love for the benefit of others (see Philippians 2:1-11).

The ‘shaking’ signals the in-breaking New Creation. This New Creation shakes’ the old order and opens the space for us to be Filled Full.

Filled Full

I. ***Filled Full of Joy***

*“So the women hurried away from the tomb, **afraid yet filled [mega] with joy**, and ran to tell his disciples.”* (Emphasis Added) – Matthew 28:8

We can appreciate that sense of fear. One scholar, R.T. France writes, helpfully:

“The women’s reaction, *afraid yet filled with joy*, is surely a very natural response. The angel himself was terrifying, and the absence of the body unnerving. But, however little they yet understood it, here was hope in place of despair and the promise of seeing Jesus again.”¹

This line, “...*afraid, yet filled with joy*...” tells us that this is a legitimate space to inhabit both.

Take Home: Much of the time, our anxiety, our ‘afraid,’ is linked to the fact that we just don’t know everything. We don’t know how things will turn out in the short term.

But joy is about reading our situation in light of the big story – and we know how it will end. Because Jesus was raised, “All will be well. And all manner of things will be well...” to riff on Julian of Norwich.²

We can be ‘filled with joy,’ even in the middle of the hardest, scariest things possible, because Jesus has beaten death. He’s opened the way to life forever.

*“So they left the tomb quickly with fear and **great [mega] joy**, and ran to tell his disciples.”* – Matthew 28:8, NRSV

¹ France, R.T. (11 July 2007). *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Matthew*. Eerdmans.

² Julian Norwich, 14th-century English person.

Because the old-order is shaken, where the *seismos-mega* signals the new creation, there can be joy-*mega*; even if it’s also mixed with a measure of the mystery of not knowing what’s next.

II. ***Filled Full of Hope***

“Suddenly Jesus met them. ‘Greetings,’ he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.’” – Matthew 28:9-10

This all sounds *too good to be true*. So, ‘why believe any of this?’

1) Matthew, this male disciple, records that *women* were the first witnesses of the resurrected Jesus. Women were not trusted to bear witness in court at that time and place. If this was a ‘made up’ story, the writer would *never* have included women as the first witnesses. But Matthew feels bound to tell the truth of what happened, despite it making the story less credible in that world.

Not only that: it makes the fearful male disciples look pretty bad – including Matthew, the gospel writer. Why make up a story that makes you look bad?

2) The Christian claim that Jesus was alive could have easily been disproved by recovering and displaying the body. But as we heard in our text, the Jewish religious leaders sought to cover up what happened – saying the disciples stole his body. But historians generally agree that the tomb was empty. Jesus’ body was gone. It’s, ‘why’ that’s the big question.

3) The women here, and then Jesus’ remaining eleven disciples, “...worshiped him...” though some of disciples had their doubts, or ‘hesitations.’ We need to know that for Jewish folks – like the women, like the disciples – to *worship* anyone except God alone was blasphemous; utterly unthinkable.

What could lead these Jewish people to begin to worship Jesus? Only if they really saw Him raised to life again.

“There are good and even superior reasons to claiming that the resurrection of Jesus was a historical event, and consequently the Lord himself is a living reality.” – Wolfhart Pannenberg³

4) All of these disciples faced intense persecution as they lived to tell this story. Most died *because* they doggedly maintained that they saw Jesus alive, and that people need to turn in trust to Jesus to be put right with God. I wouldn’t give my life up or willingly suffer like that to spread a message I knew wasn’t true. They wouldn’t either.

There’s an **existential component to faith as well**. At some point, we have to simply open ourselves up to God, and ask Him to work in us, to show Himself to us. Investigate the historical question - but also – just start praying. Ask God to show Himself to you in your journey.

³ Pannenberg, Wolfhart, 1987

III. ***Filled Full of Assurance***

“...Go and tell **my brothers**....” – Matthew 28:10b - Not just ‘my disciples’ – **my brothers**.

When Jesus is arrested, we need to remember that all His disciples fled - deserted Him. This simple phrase, “...my brothers...” is meant to communicate reassurance and affection.

Jesus doesn’t confront them for their failure. He could have; but the resurrection shakes up and breaks open a whole new way.

The old order: quick to point fingers, to pass blame, to condemn and cancel. That is shaken down.

The resurrection of Jesus confirms: ‘The way of grace is how God’s new creation works.’ The empty tomb opens the way to be Filled Full of assurance.

Take Home: His word for them? ‘My brothers.’ His word for you? ‘My brothers. My sisters.’ This day spells a new day - Fresh mercy. This day says mercy is at the center of God’s new creation.

What you’ve done and what you’ve been is always open to becoming something else - something new. When we’re Filled Full of assurance of God’s mercy, we now embody this way of mercy toward others (See Matthew 5:7; 9:13).

IV. ***Filled Full of Purpose***

“...All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I’ve commanded you...” - Matthew 28:18-20a

Take Home: God’s people now join in God’s purposes for the world. We are to be a people of ‘New Creation’ working in the world; and by living in the ‘new creation way,’ of self-giving love, we continue shake the world up.

V. ***Filled Full of God’s Own Presence***

Jesus will return to His Father, but He says this, *“...And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* – Matthew 28:20b.

How is Jesus, ‘with us?’ Through the presence of His Spirit in us. The great promise is of His great presence.

The bonus of being Filled Full of God’s own presences is that we are **Filled Full of courage**.

His, “Do not be afraid, but go...” to the women.

His, “All authority is mine, so go...” to his disciples.

And now we hear it too. His authority sends us. His Spirit, in us, empowers us.

Life Group Discussion and Reflection

Open Up

What part of the story of Jesus’ resurrection is most meaningful or exciting to you? Which parts leave you somewhat confused or curious?

Dig In

1. **Read Matthew 28:1-7.** In the message, we saw how we use the language of, ‘seismic shifts’ to describe massive shifts in our thinking. Matthew’s Gospel includes the language of *seismos* [Greek] at key points in Jesus’ story – including literal earthquakes at Jesus’ death and resurrection.
 - a. How has embracing Jesus’ resurrection ‘shaken up’ your life to this point?

For example: how has the resurrection of Jesus led you to see the world differently, or live differently? How has it changed your understanding of suffering, or forgiveness? Of security about the future, or how you think about Christian duty toward those who are poor or suffering?
 - b. In what ways do you think God wants to keep ‘shaking up’ how you view the world and how you live? (*i.e.* In what areas of your life did this message spark a longing for deeper growth in you?)
2. **Read Matthew 28:8-10.** This text speaks of how the women are, “...afraid, yet *filled with joy*.” In the message, we saw how joy results from restored relationship (Jesus, the one they love, is alive!), and the ability to read our situation in light of God’s hope-filled future.
 - a. Are there areas where you are currently experiencing this mysterious mix of, ‘afraid, yet filled with joy?’ (Share it with your group and come back to these areas in the prayer time if appropriate).
 - b. How does the reality of Jesus’ resurrection help you ‘read’ your situation in a new light?

3. **Read Matthew 28:11-20.** We are not only filled with joy, hope, and assurance. We are also filled with purpose and God’s own presence. We are ‘on mission with God.’
- a. This text teaches that Jesus shares the throne with God the Father, and this is a key reason we believe that the one true God is, “Trinity” – Father, Son and Holy Spirit (not to mention, Jesus instructs us to baptize people in the “name” – singular – of the three. Again, a trinitarian formulation).
 - i. How might Jesus’ authority over heaven and earth influence how you understand our shared mission (given to the first disciples and, by extension, all of us)?
 - ii. What does the promise of Jesus’ presence with us as we pursue the mission mean to you? How might you need to lean into this more?

Prayer

Take time to pray together in thanksgiving for God’s new creation work through Jesus. Pray for specific needs of the group. Pray also for the mission of Summit Drive as we seek to live out what Jesus has called us to in terms of making disciples of all nations.