

## Aughnacloy, Ballymagrane, Clogherney & Sixmilecross Presbyterian Churches

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Dear Friends

As the minister of the congregations of Aughnacloy, Ballymagrane, and the vacant Congregations of Sixmilecross and Cloghereny, it is a great privilege that I have to bring this weekly devotion to you. I trust that you are all keeping safe and well in these present times. These certainly are unprecedented times. We are beginning to settle into the new routines that social distancing, self-isolation have brought to us as a society and the home-schooling is getting a well-earned rest. In the midst of all the present uncertainty, the words of the Angel on that Resurrection morning brings us a message filled with confidence for these days as He declares in our text for today:

***Matthew 28:1-15*** ... *Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. 2 There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. 4 The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. 5 The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. 6 He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you." 8 So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." 11 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. 12 When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, 13 telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' 14 If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." 15 So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day. Amen.*

Today as we rejoice in the resurrection of Jesus He came down from the cross, not by His own power but as a limp, bloodied, lifeless body that was cleaned and wrapped in linen by the gentle hands of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, and laid in a tomb. He came down from the cross a dead man. He was buried as a dead man. However, three days later, the dead

man came to life! Death, sin, and Satan forever defeated, Today as it was then, there are many who would stubbornly deny the actual bodily resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, calls for our believing response. The gospel is not left to our imagination or literary creativity. It is based on an actual person and actual events that purchased an actual salvation for all that believe.

We must rely on the testimonies of those who witnessed the resurrected Christ. For those scoffing at such testimony, we must not forget that all of the great events of human history that we study and reflect upon, we have them by the virtue of the testimony of others. The conquering mastery of Alexander the Great, Columbus' discovery of the New World and many more rely upon verifiable testimony of different witnesses. We have no trouble believing witnesses to other historical figures and events. Nevertheless, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead appears to be a different story with many people having difficulty in believing His resurrection. Romans 10:9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. All of these other testimonies may inspire us and motivate us, but they will still leave us without a relationship with God and without hope in this world. Today we are looking briefly at the testimony of: The Angel, The Women and the Guards. Firstly; consider the angel that calmly bore testimony to the

risen Christ. He spoke up in giving testimony to the women of the risen Christ. Matthew 28:5 The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He was right on all accounts! This further highlights that the crucifixion of Jesus was no mistake or tragedy but divinely orchestrated and planned for our redemption. Matthew 28:6 He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Jesus had been telling His followers that the day would come when He would be accused and mocked by the religious leaders and people of Israel, and then be crucified. He expected it because He came for that purpose. Jesus also bore witness to His own resurrection, predicting that three days after His crucifixion His resurrection from the dead would happen. We see that in the quick response of the women to the angel's instructions as well as in the deathly fear that fell upon the hardened soldiers guarding the tomb.

The women: It was not the eleven apostles that first received the testimony of Christ's resurrection but it was the women that followed Him. They were the last to leave Him at the cross and the first to hear the good news of the resurrection. Though a woman's testimony lacked weight in the ancient world, the Lord chose to reveal the glory of His resurrection to these women so that they might be the first to know the hope of the resurrection, and that they might be instruments of the gospel as fellow heirs of the grace of life through Christ. The angel told them 28:7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. Matthew also tells us, 28:8 So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

These women ran back to Jerusalem to tell the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead! Their testimony sent the other disciples whirling toward the empty tomb.

The guards: They "reported to the chief priests all that had happened." v11. So fearful, so amazed by what happened, the religious leaders knew that they had to silence them. The quickest way to silence their remarkable testimony was with "a large sum of money" given "to the soldiers." V12 However, as we've already noted, their false testimony was so ridiculous that it gives testimony to the truth that Jesus was raised from the dead!

Jesus Christ appeared to the women. His absence from the tomb witnessed by the guards. later He appeared to the disciples who regularly testified of the resurrection of Christ, and His appearance to over five hundred people at one time, according to Paul's testimony in 1 Corinthians 15:6.

Now the question that each of us faces is this: do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, crucified in a sin-atonement death and raised from the dead by the glory of the Father?

Do you trust in Him? The evidence is before us on the pages of scripture for the resurrection, yet there remains the void of evidence from credible sources that the resurrection never happened.

Comfort and hope: The whole event gives comfort and hope to the believer. The angel's announcement that the tomb was empty gave hope. It is by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that the Lord calls us. The source of our comfort and hope is not in our level of performance but in the reality that we have a risen Lord.

Either you worship Him or you scramble to concoct your own reason why the resurrection is not true or why it is meaningless or why it doesn't apply to you. The testimonies are clear. Jesus Christ is raised from the dead. There is an empty tomb to prove it! Do you believe in Him? May the words of this Hymn be an encouragement to you?

*Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son;  
tomb;  
Endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won;  
and gloom;  
Angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away,  
of triumph sing,  
Kept the folded grave-clothes where thy body lay.  
lost its sting.*

*Lo! Jesus meets us, risen from the  
Lovingly he greets us, scatters fear  
Let the church with gladness, hymns  
For her Lord now liveth, death hath*

*Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son;  
Prince of life;  
Endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won.  
our strife;*

*No more we doubt thee, glorious  
Life is naught without thee: aid us in*

*Make us more than conquerors, through thy  
deathless love:*

*Bring us safe thro' Jordan to thy home above.*

Prayer: Loving Lord, we thank you for your everlasting love for all of your creation. We ask that this would be a very special Easter for many people, that they may have that courage to turn their life over to You our risen conquering Saviour and know Your everlasting love and commitment, which enables all who trust to stand firm in the face of adversity. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all this day and forevermore? Amen.