

## **A Man of His Word**

Easter Sunday; Series A

Matthew 28:1-10

**“He is not here. He is risen, as he said.”**

**Matthew 28:6**

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Our Lord is a man of his Word! Wrapped in those words is the joyful truth that our God is reliable and his Word that he gives us is a Word of promise that is reliable. The Gospel writer St. Matthew reminded us this morning in our Gospel reading of this reliable Word of promise. He is risen, just as he said (Mt 28:6).

“Just as he said.” Those words are spoken by an angel of the Lord in our Gospel reading. This angel of the Lord, as all angels are, is a messenger sent by God to speak a message of God to his people. This angel’s words are a reminder of God’s promised, reliable Word.

Long ago God promised a Messiah who would save us from our sins. In the fullness of time Jesus was born as the beginning of the fulfillment of that promise. Throughout his Ministry Jesus continued to fulfill the promises of Scripture through his teaching, healing, and miracles. The words spoken by our Triune God through the mouths of prophets some four hundred plus years prior were actually coming true in this Jesus—“just as he said.” Throughout his Ministry Jesus prophesied and predicted to his disciples that he would suffer for the sins of the world, die on a cross, and then rise from the dead. And then he did it, “Just as he said.” The angel’s words are a reminder of the promise. They point us to the person of Jesus, our resurrected Lord, and his reliable Word!

We need a reminder that points us to a promise, don’t we? You and I make promises all the time. They usually aren’t all that formal, maybe not even always that official. But the reliability of our character and words are tested every day in the things that we say we will do. The things we say to our husbands, wives, parents, children, friends, neighbors, employers, and employees. So many of the people that are close to us are counting on the reliability of our words. They are trusting that we will do what we say. We often need a reminder that points us to the promises that we have made.

There is a story I am reminded of in which a young man needed a reminder of a promise he once made in order to finally follow through with his word. Ten years ago Alan, a third grade student in Mrs. Wood's class in Huntsville, Arkansas penned a note to accompany a paper cut-out modeled after the title character in the popular children's book *Flat Stanley*. After being smashed by a bulletin board in his sleep, the book's protagonist makes the most of his new 2-D shape by mailing himself to friends. Like many other elementary school teachers who read *Flat Stanley* with their students, Wood asked the children in her class to send their Stanley cut-outs to relatives or friends, who would then take them on a journey and detail the character’s exploits in a letter back.

In the spring of 2004 Alan’s Flat Stanley emerged from a box in Baghdad, Iraq. Brian Owens was the Army soldier who received Alan’s Flat Stanley cutout and letter and was tasked with the responsibility to detail the character’s adventures

in a letter back. Owens was immediately on board, folding Stanley up and tucking him safely into his wallet. Only Owens didn't respond right away. The folded up Flat Stanley remained tucked in his wallet for ten long years from 2004 to 2014.

In the early part of this year Alan's Flat Stanley made it home. Ten years after Owens stuffed a folded up Flat Stanley in his wallet as a reminder of a promise, he finally followed through on his word. The constant activity over the course of ten years eventually wore out Owens' wallet. As he sifted through its contents one day, he came upon a colored piece of tightly folded paper. "After I found Stanley again and realized, 'Oh my gosh, I still have this thing,' it kind of took on a different, deeper meaning," Owens said. "It was almost like I had a mission I hadn't completed yet."

In the meantime Stanley built an impressive military resume. He helped carry out dozens of combat patrols through Baghdad. He held steady through firefights and mortar attacks. He saw the banks of the Tigris River. He was there on the day of Iraq's first democratic elections. He was there, still, when the disturbing scenes and constant stress began to wear Owens down in his personal life, leaving the soldier angry and confused. Through it all there was a reminder of a promise, the silent passenger, always with him (Maria Polletta, "Flat Stanley Home After A Decade in Soldier's Wallet," *USA Today*, March 26, 2014, [www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/03/23/flat-stanley-home-safe-after-decade-in-soldiers-wallet-/6762359/](http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/03/23/flat-stanley-home-safe-after-decade-in-soldiers-wallet-/6762359/)).

"Just as he said." At first this is all that the women at the empty tomb were given early in the morning on that first day of the week. They did not first see the risen Lord Jesus. They first heard a Word that they were called upon to believe and trust. "He is not here, for he has risen, as he said" (Mt 28:6). This Word that the angel gave them was their reminder. It pointed them to the reliable Jesus and his reliable Word of promise.

Three times throughout his Ministry, well before his crucifixion and resurrection from the dead, Jesus prophesied to his believers that he would be crucified and on the third day rise (Mt 16:21; Mt 17:22-23; Mt 20:17-19). The women who arrived at the tomb early on the first day of the week knew the Word of promise. They had a reminder of it that was tucked away in their hearts and minds like a silent passenger. Perhaps this is why they obeyed every instruction that the angel gave them after they saw the tomb of Jesus empty. Like the Iraq War veteran folding up a cardboard cutout of a character from a book, tucking it in his wallet and taking it with him throughout his travels, so also throughout their travels these women and the other disciples took with them this Word of promise from their Lord Jesus.

On that first Palm Sunday when Jesus began his victory parade in Jerusalem to the waving of palm branches and loud hosannas, there was the promise resting in the hearts of his faithful disciples. In the upper room where Jesus eats the last supper with his disciples on the night that he was betrayed by Judas, he institutes the Lord's Supper and there is the promise, attached to bread and wine, "Take and eat. Take and drink . . . for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:26-28). As Jesus was hanging from the cross in bitter agony, suffering for the sins of the world while his disciples were faithlessly fleeing him in fear, you could still find evidence of the promise of God clothed in the forgiving words of Jesus, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they are doing" (Lk 23:34). And then on the morning of the resurrection even before we see a body we hear a word and are compelled to believe and trust in it, "He has risen, just as he said." A reliable Word that points us back and reminds us of the promise that God made long ago and is now fulfilled!

Now God gives you not just a reminder of that promise but he does one better by giving you the Promised One—our Lord Jesus. What is Jesus' Word of promise for you and me? Well, if you ever made a trip to a baptismal font like this one down here, that's where it starts (if not, speak to me afterwards!). At a font like this God attaches his promise to ordinary water. With reliable words he gives you the reliable Word of promise, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit." Through those baptismal waters he promises to forgive all your sins, every single one that you ever committed and ever will commit. He promises to forgive your unreliable words, promises, and actions and even use those mistakes and failures for his greater purposes. God, the Father promises to give to you personally everything that Jesus purchased with his innocent, precious blood, and suffering and death on the cross and victorious resurrection from death itself.

This reliable God-man of his Word promises to do what no human being can do for you. He promises to declare you his holy child unto eternity. He promises a victory for you that is greater than any sports victory or personal achievement you can ever achieve. As his child he promises to give you an eternal inheritance in heaven. He promises to never to leave you nor forsake you. He promises to be faithful to you even when the disturbing scenes and constant stress of your life wears you down. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! He is a man of his Word! Wrapped in those words is the joyful truth that our God is reliable and his Word that he gives us is a Word of promise that is reliable. Promise made and promise kept! A blessed resurrection Sunday to all of you! Amen.