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***“From Galilee to Cesarea Maritima to the World”***

**A sermon by Cheryl B. Henry**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter (Year C)  
April 28, 2019**

Matthew 28.16-20

Psalm 40.9-10

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It was a picture, perfect day  
a little over a year ago when

I, with a small band of pilgrims from Columbia Seminary,  
first laid eyes on Caesarea Maritima.

Caesarea Maritima  
is an ancient port town  
on the coast of the Mediterranean sea in Israel.

Bequeathed to and then built to glory by  
King Herod who named it after Caesar Augustus,  
Caesarea Maritima was the place where Peter met Cornelius.  
It is the place where Paul when he was endangered in Jerusalem  
shoved off to travel back to his home in Taurusus.  
The place Paul came back to visit  
between his 2nd and 3rd mission trips.  
And later it was where Paul was thrown in prison  
for 2 years before being sent to Rome for trial.

In the third century Caesarea Maritima is the place  
where the Christian theologian Origen wrote his treatises  
and with the help of Pamphilus  
established the Theological School of Caesarea

which gained a reputation for having  
the most extensive ecclesiastical library of its time.<sup>1</sup>

It is a place where I learned that at one point in its history  
hippodromes or stadiums were popular.

Think football and reality TV, here.

These seating-in-the-round places were  
the venues for horse races and chariot races.

They were also the places where Christians were routinely,  
and brutally, because of their faith,

pitted against wild animals like lions and bears --

a bloody, deadly sporting affair which the Roman elite enjoyed  
at our expense.

In Caesarea Maritima hippodromes or stadiums  
fell out of fashion as Christianity came into greater power there.

Amphitheaters took their place.

Amphitheaters as you know, have semi-circle seating  
with a stage at the bottom.

They were places where plays and concerts  
were performed.

The only blood on an amphitheater  
is the neatly staged fake blood that serves  
a larger story . . .

and no one (beast or human) is killed.

Christians, for obvious reasons!,

liked amphitheaters better than stadiums  
. . . in those days!

But perhaps the most important thing of all,  
for Christians to know about Caesarea Maritima ,  
is that, it was from its shores  
that Jesus' disciples would have  
launched on their way out  
into the rest of the world.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caesarea\\_Maritima](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caesarea_Maritima)

And they would do this because  
each by his or her own faith,  
were seeking to do as Jesus had asked them to do  
at his resurrection;  
to 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 he had commanded them.

It's complicated  
to know with certainty where the first disciples sailed  
as they sailed away from Caesarea Maritima--  
facts and legends intermingle--  
but there is little doubt that wherever they went  
they went from Galilee to Caesarea Maritima  
then to the world.

Standing there that day  
gazing over the vast blueness of the Mediterranean  
it was not hard to imagine it.

Thomas and Bartholemew  
going to India.  
Philip heading toward North Africa.  
Peter to Rome, of course.  
Matthew to Persia and Ethiopia  
Andrew to areas in Turkey and the Soviet Union  
And James to Rome and in some mysterious way  
also to Spain? (Ah the El Camino??  
Still not sure,  
if I understand  
how James made it to Spain!)

All we know is that  
sometime after their meeting the risen Jesus  
on the mountain in Galilee  
the disciples' next step was Caesarea Maritima  
and then the world!

Standing there at Caesarea Maritima  
with all these stories fresh in our ears  
our imaginations made and appreciated the connections so easily.  
How *their* boats leaving the dock of that great city in their day  
so absolutely and critically touched our shores!  
How *they* and *we* (you and me, the church,  
and all the world as we know it) were woven together.  
Connected.

(pause)

Can you imagine how it was for them?

Now Sure! As fishermen (most of them)  
had been on lots of boats.  
But remember, those were lake boats;  
boats designed to navigate Lake Galilee  
(that is a lake about the size of Kerr Lake here in NC).

The boats at Caesarea Maritima  
were built to sail the mighty Mediterranean  
whose horizons they could not see with the naked eye.

The gospels tell us Jesus' disciples (most of them anyway)  
were small time and small-town folk.  
They may have traveled into neighboring Sepphoris for work,  
or even to Jerusalem for holy days,  
but for the most part,  
they lived in much smaller places - Nazareth, Capernaum.  
And their most recent experience in Jerusalem

surely must have left them a bit wary of BIG cities.  
In the main, the disciples were local people,  
used to local ways and a local language.  
Can you imagine the cultural shift alone for them?  
Getting in a boat to cross the Mediterranean Sea  
with all that that would involve?  
Coming from where they had come from?  
Coming with ALL that they had already been through.

Standing at Caesarea Maritima

that day, our small band of pilgrims, couldn't help but see  
how indebted we were, (we are!),  
to those simple, imperfect fisher folk  
who dared to trust Jesus at his word?  
Who set off as pilgrims into their world  
with little but their faith  
. . . and their doubts (truthful Matthew doesn't leave that out!)  
and a Christ-given fiery desire in their hearts  
to baptize (if you will) all the earth  
in the good news that they themselves had witnessed.  
The good news of a love could not be killed.  
The good news of Jesus, God's own son,  
had come to earth,  
who had lived as a human being among human beings,  
who through his healing and teaching  
to all those around him  
began the work of bringing this old world back to life  
and back to love.  
What he did had made the wrong people angry,  
and in the end, he suffered both their wrath  
and the betrayal of by those who loved him best.  
Those disciples went out to tell the story  
to all who would listen  
about how Jesus died forgiving all this.  
And most amazing of all,  
how though dead, God raised him up; resurrected him

as none had ever been before;  
ALL for love of him who loved us . . .  
all to lead us to the place of our own resurrection  
in God's kingdom of heaven

That day in Caesarea Maritima  
some 2,000 years after those disciples did what they did,  
we could still feel the  
the spine-tingling power of God's love  
that still lived and made us alive  
to love and hope and courage and faith to our own day.  
And we thanked God for the way in which Jesus' disciples  
went from Galilee  
to Caesarea Maritima  
and into the World.

*(Pause)*

Now at the same time  
as we saw and felt all this that had happened in the past;  
as we felt the good news of Christ's love for us still in  
it all these 2,000 years later,  
we also felt a certain nagging conflict.

Most notably we saw the 2,000-year gap between  
the world as it was then and the world as it is now.

There is no doubt that the world had changed  
since those first disciples.

For one thing our society now loves both hippodromes / stadiums  
(isn't hippodrome a more fun word though?)  
and amphitheaters!

(No one worries about Christians being martyred  
in a hippodrome - only football players getting concussions.  
And no one bats an eye to see a production of "Godspell"  
or "Jesus Christ Superstar" at an amphitheater --  
getting them to a church to hear the same story,

well, that's much harder!

Maybe it's the lack of fake blood at church?)

I daresay there are very few persons we could find on this earth,  
who don't know something about who Jesus is or was in our day.

Our world in many levels is so different than it was  
when those first disciples set out.

Caesarea Maritima itself is quite different.

Today it teems with tourist.

Today it is not the jumping off place to the world.

Not even for people who live there--

that would be Tel Aviv and a plane!

And today, more often than not,

at least as I experience it (and maybe you too),

the people we as Christ's disciples meet out in "THE WORLD"

are not persons who feel that they don't know who Jesus is.

Rather they are persons who tell me

that they know us Christians all too well.

And maybe they are right

or maybe they are wrong,

or maybe they know "those" Christians

but not "US" Christians,

but for whatever reason,

a lot them really don't want to have much to do with us.

In 2,000 years', time

a lot of history has happened.

Most specifically, a lot of Christian history has happened.

Today we as Christ's disciples (and the church)

deal with something the first disciples

did not have to deal with --

A whole history of our glaring imperfections.

(And some of them they are pretty glaring.)

A witness that sometimes,

despite Jesus' and our best work,

doesn't seem to be very new or life-giving to some in our world.

With 2,000 years between us and the disciples,  
we know, as they could not have,  
that as we Christians - witnesses to Christ -  
have spread out over the earth  
that what went with us was not only the love of Christ  
but also, quite a lot of human sin, stupidity  
and even some good old-fashioned unredeemed hate.

What we know (with 2,000 years to prove it) is that  
though they (and we) have come to trust that the war is won,  
the strife is o'er,  
and Christ is risen, Alleluia!  
the kingdom of Heaven is not fully here yet.

Christ is alive and  
we are more alive! Yes, thanks be to God!  
But we are not fully resurrected as Jesus is.  
And while the world is new in so many, wonderful ways,  
death's breath is still with us.

And so today,  
as we hear Matthew's Jesus tell us, his disciples,  
to "Go out into all the world"  
to baptize and teach and be God's love,  
how do we understand that command?

How do we in our day  
with our faith . . . and all our doubt,  
set out from the Galilee where we have met our risen Lord  
to the launching place that will propel us into all the world?

Well,  
let me quickly suggest  
that when we review our history  
and as we become aware  
of all the less than life-giving and unloving "stuff"



we bring with us alongside  
the holy desire to share Christ's good news --  
we should remember that though our understanding  
of all this may seem like "new" news to us . . .  
it is not "new" news to God  
nor do I suspect it would have been even to those first disciples.

For they, like us,  
also came to Galilee to meet a risen Lord  
having failed, remember? (All that Holy Week stuff.)

And maybe that's the point.  
They had failed.  
But, even so, something in them would not stay quiet.  
Something they knew and trusted about Jesus  
even more than about themselves.

And so, they, with us,  
showed up at Galilee  
to check out the rumors;  
to meet the risen Jesus.

And they did meet him. And we do, too.  
There in all his resurrected love and new life.  
All his forgiveness that paves the way for a new start.

Do you wonder if you have met the risen Christ this Easter?

Well some Easters I have, too . . .

But there is a  
a small snatch of a larger Mary Oliver poem that just this week  
reminded me that I have (that I do) meet the risen Christ . . .  
way more often than I realize.

The words go like this:  
It is serious  
to be alive  
on a fresh morning  
in a broken world.<sup>2</sup>

Let me say it again,  
It is serious  
to be alive  
on a fresh morning  
in a broken world.

Friends,  
it's that the very core of Easter's joy.  
It's that Jesus?

Kindred in Christ,  
when we go out into this world  
that Jesus so loved and wants us to tell  
about his love and living  
the brokenness is out there (*point out*)  
*AND* it's also in here (*point to self*).  
And this is not new in all the world.

But dear loved ones,  
broken or not,  
wouldn't it be more broken  
to give up on the serious,  
incredible news that there is One  
who is alive on a fresh morning?  
One who is telling us (ALL of us!)  
that we aren't dead either.

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<sup>2</sup> Mary Oliver, "Invitation," *A Thousand Mornings* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013).

Wouldn't it be more broken  
on this fresh morning  
with this serious reality in our hearts  
despite our imperfections (yes, even our sin)  
to keep our lips tight  
about the care we ourselves have felt  
and the signs we have seen of this world coming back to life?

Wouldn't it be more broken  
to hoard such a gift?  
To play small  
with Christ's incarnate promise of living and life  
for all living creatures?

It is serious  
to be alive  
on a fresh morning  
in a broken world.

Can you really stay where you are?  
(wherever you are)  
when you see and trust that?

Amen.

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*Because sermons are meant to be preached and are therefore prepared with the emphasis on verbal presentation (i.e., are written for the ear), the written accounts occasionally deviate from proper and generally accepted principles of grammar and punctuation. Most often, these deviations are not mistakes per se, but are indicative of an attempt to aid the listener in the delivery of the sermon.*