Hi,

Today’s updates:

* My noon Tuesday class on Genesis will meet today on [my new Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/Scott-Engle-St-Andrew-UMC-110365790736617/?modal=admin_todo_tour).
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://scottengle.org/scotts-weekly-classes/). All the postings are up-to-date.

Our final comeback story is the most dramatic and important of all.

***Matthew 27:45-54; 28:1-10 (NRSV)***

**From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o’clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, “This man is calling for Elijah.” At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.” Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, “Truly this man was God’s Son!”**

**After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message for you.” So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”**

I find that Christians often have a difficult time understanding the relationship of Good Friday to Easter. For example, I’m often asked, “What is good about ‘Good Friday’ anyway? Jesus was killed!” And when I ask my classes to tell me the climax of the biblical story, the answer is often the resurrection, when it is really the cross. So . . . we are talking about Good Friday and Easter when it is the time for neither and a good occasion to seek a deeper understanding of this “comeback story.”

*A crucified Messiah*

We have to begin the story on the Sunday before the crucifixion, the day we call Palm Sunday. When Jesus rides into Jerusalem, it is as Israel’s Messiah. The words, the symbols, the crowds . . . it all means one thing. Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, the one sent by God who would cleanse the temple and usher in the Kingdom of God. Alleluia! But by Friday afternoon, Jesus is a *crucified Messiah*.

Because we know that Jesus was the Messiah and was also crucified, it is hard for us to grasp that for any first-century Jew, *crucified Messiah* was an oxymoron, i.e., a combination of contradictory words. So far as the Jews were concerned, there was simply no way that God’s Messiah could end up on a Roman cross. Such an idea was absurd, foolish, crazy. The fact that Jesus ended up dead on a cross could mean only one thing – that he wasn’t the Messiah, that once again the hopes of Israel had been dashed upon the rocks of Roman reality. On that dark Friday afternoon, anything that we might call a “Jesus movement” collapsed. The disciples are in hiding, fearful that they too will be picked by the Jewish leadership or the Romans . . . but just ahead lies Sunday.

*Not Just the Biggest Miracle Ever*

We can see the true significance of the resurrection best when we look at it through the eyes of a first-century Jew, for whom “crucified Messiah” was an impossible notion. When Jesus is raised to new life by God, it is the *proof* that although Jesus was crucified by the Romans he was, nonetheless, God’s Messiah. It is the resurrection that turned the phrase *crucified Messiah* from an absurdity into a revelation of God’s love and faithfulness.

We shouldn’t be surprised that the apostles met so much resistance as they worked to carry this Good News. As Paul put it, “we proclaim Messiah crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks [meaning simply, non-Jews]” (1 Cor.1:23).

The resurrection of Jesus was his vindication, the proof that he was right all along and that the salvation of Israel and hence the whole world had been won through his journey of suffering, shame, and death. The resurrection is the reason why there are Christians at all. Had Jesus’ death been the end of the story, there would be no Christians, no teachings preserved, no stories told.

Yet, for all that, the resurrection is not the climax of the story; it was not the place of God’s victory over sin and death. That place was the cross. Here again is Paul: “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being the saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18).

*The Good in Good Friday*

But how could that be? How could God’s victory be won via Jesus’ death? How could it be that our reconciliation with God is accomplished on that cross?

These questions and many more swirl around the word, “atonement.” You can think of it as “at-one-ment,” putting us “at-one” with God, i.e., putting our relationship right. It is a relational idea and speaks to our relationship with God.

Though the NT writers are clear that this atonement has been accomplished via the cross, they do not offer any single theory of how it works. Instead, we get various images. For example, one image is grounded in the courtroom: Jesus stands in our place and takes the punishment that is our due. Another image is taken from the slave-market: God redeems us from our bondage. Yet another is that of a pardon, taken from the language of kings. None of these images tell the whole story by themselves; together, they provide a rich picture of how it is that Jesus put us right with God.

Here is a way to tell the story that I think is faithful to the biblical writings and puts the credit for our salvation where it belongs, not on us but upon God:

God had made a promise to Abraham that the world would be put right and that it would be done through his own family, indeed, that all the families of the earth would be blessed through them. And God had rescued Abraham’s family from slavery in Egypt, making a covenant with them, teaching them how to live in right relationship with God and one another. He would be their God, they would be his people, and one day the world would be put right, justice and mercy would remake the planet.

God’s teaching boiled down to two things: love God and love neighbor. Yet, tragically, this love-filled life proved impossible for God’s people. They chased after other gods and they failed to love their neighbors every day. They even lost sight of who their neighbors were. They forgot that all the families of the earth were to be blessed through them. They imagined that they had some sort of exclusive claim on God.

It became sadly evident that God’s promise to restore and renew the cosmos could not be kept, for his people could not keep their end of the bargain. So what did that mean, would God’s promise stay an unfulfilled promise forever?

In a word, no. God would provide one Jew who would be utterly faithful to the covenant, loving God and loving neighbor every day and in every way. God, in the person of Jesus, would do and be for Israel what Israel was unable to do and be for herself.

Of course, such love put Jesus on a collision course with the powers of this world, who had long forgotten God’s ways. Jesus’ path would take him to that cross. It had to, for the only way off that path was for Jesus to abandon the vocation given him by God. But, instead, Jesus was faithful all the way to the cross. The covenant had been kept by this one faithful Jew and the restored relationship of this kept covenant can be ours, if we only trust Jesus and embrace him as our representative Messiah, the one whose faithfulness revealed that God is not only the great promise-make but the great promise-keeper.

And how do we know that this is a true story? By virtue of the fact that God raised Jesus to new life and gave him dominion over the heavens and the earth. Alleluia, indeed!

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott