Matthew 27:62- Matthew 28: 10

 The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate 63and said, ‘Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, “After three days I will rise again.” 64Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, “He has been raised from the dead”, and the last deception would be worse than the first.’ 65Pilate said to them, ‘You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can.’ 66So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

28:1 After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. 2And 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. 3His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 4For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. 5But the angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. 6He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 7Then 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.’ 8So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9Suddenly Jesus met them and said, ‘Greetings!’ And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. 10Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.’

Happy Easter, MT/NWY Synod!

This is the day that God has acted. So let us rejoice and be glad in it.

For on this day Jesus Christ, our New Life, is risen. He is freed from the tomb of death and handing out New Life right and left. This is more than the day the Lord has made…this is the day that God has done something, bringing salvation out of suffering, bringing new life out of old death. What wonderful news! Christ is risen, he is risen indeed. Alleluia!

But do we want it? Do we really want this good news and the New Life that God brings out of the cross and tomb. We need it. But do we want it?

I wonder if sometimes we don’t. Because the New Life that Jesus brings is scary. This New Life means that things will change, that the old passes away and the new comes in. It means transformation from what was, to what God wills to be. And that frightens us, because it means we are no longer in control and we know it.

Look at the story from Matthew’s gospel. The religious leaders and Pilate are so scared of the New Life entering the world and changing their set-up that they conspire to secure Jesus’ dead body and the new life he brings inside a tomb. So they put a large stone in front of the dark hole and then seal the stone in place. And then they set guards around the front of the tomb overnight. All to make sure dead stays dead. The Messiah’s death and the New Life he promises to bring isn’t going anywhere, they say, as if they are the ones in control.

But God has different ideas and a different type of power that they do not have. God acts big and New Life is released from the old death of the tomb. Earthquakes shake up everything. An angel sizzles like lightening and rolls away that stone like a tiny pebble. The terrified guards freeze like dead men. And New Life in Jesus Christ appears to the women trembling with fear and great joy. “Greetings,” he says like it’s any other day. And the women who followed Christ through everything drop to their knees and worship, transformed by the New Life that has just greeted them on the path.

New Life and God’s love that come with it has arrived into our old lives in the resurrected Christ! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

But do we want it, this New life. Maybe we’re looking forward to it in the afterlife, but do we want this New Life in our lives now, today? When we look around this world it seems like we humans would rather have old death. We seek it in our entertainment and play act it for fun. We cling to ways to hurt and kill each other. We react with violent, death-dealing words or deeds or laws or thoughts to anyone we fear or anything we can’t control. We tear down structures that really do make us safer and help us live healthier lives, and we hold onto and even try to build systems – social, economic, religious, political, moral – systems that bring death, especially to others. While we resist and grieve the consequences of the old death, we can’t seem to let it go. It holds us tightly as the devil we know so we cling to it rather than something we don’t know.

New Life, though. That brings something that is, well, New. We don’t know what to do with that newness and we certainly aren’t in control of it. New Life belongs to God and God’s Spirit is in charge. Even though Jesus tried again and again to tell us of this new life in him, we still can’t understand what it means.

We can certainly try. New Life means letting go of the old death that traps us and means being transformed by the Spirit of Life into a new person. It means living new lives in relationship to God, all other humans, and our selves. New life means loving those we fear, forgiving those who hurt us, feeding those who are hungry, welcoming those who are rejected – Christ first, and all those who he brings with him. New Life in Christ is a brand new style of life, a new perspective on life, a new approach to living in this world now. It doesn’t wait for the next life. Christ calls us to live his New Life now, even though we will fail at it and will need to be forgiven.

And guess what?! We are forgiven, given for New Life again and again, though we don’t always understand it with our brains or accept it into our hearts. In fact, Christ’s New Life gives us a new start everyday in our relationships with God, self and others.

This New Life is yours – given freely and unconditionally to you and me and all who let go of the old death to receive it in faith, in trust. Christ is risen and brings you God’s own New Life. It’s yours. Alleluia!

But when this New Life enters our lives, we can’t expect that things will remain the same. We can’t go on as before. New Life in Christ changes everything. He shakes up our lives, transforms us, creates new things in us.

So how do we let it transform us?

I’m [Bp Laurie is] something of an amateur geologist. I [She] wanted to know how mountains formed and began studying. Many mountain ranges, not all, are formed through the action of earthquakes, tiny ones and huge ones. Earthquakes are one of the most powerful forces on earth. When sliding continental plates collide, massive changes happen. Sometimes this change is a slow process that builds up and spreads over place and time. But then, when the pressure becomes too great, one plate must give way, let go, slip aside and let the other plate have its way. And major transformations happens to the landscape and anything resting on it, including folding blocks of rock into mountain ranges. Like Glacier Park in NW MT or Heart Mountain in WY – both are the result of huge blocks of rock being pushed to places miles away, plowing up everything in their path and changing the landscape forever.

In the Bible, earthquakes have an apocalyptic reputation as something that happens when God is revealing a new thing. In fact, that’s what the word “apocalypse” means – revelation of something new. In today’s text when God releases Jesus from death and the New Life of the world emerges from the tomb, an earthquake reveals what God is doing. Though the world tried to resist and hold onto the old death, God frees the New Life and God’s will has its way over death. Christ is risen, freed, and filled with the power of abundant new life that doesn’t look or act at all like the old death. And the world, those guards and the women are shaken to their core.

But in order for Christ’s New Life to shake up our lives, we do need to let go of the old one. Drop to our knees in fear and great joy. Worship at Christ’s feet in powerlessness and cling to his feet for security. We have to let go of the old death and give up our addiction to being in control of everything and everyone so that we can receive the gift of knowing we are powerless to live, truly and abundantly live, without Christ. And then, when we receive the gift of new life, Christ’s earthquake shakes us up and we are transformed into who God calls us to be.

So here’s today’s question of reflection: how has Christ’s New Life said “Greetings” to you on your life’s path? When have you experienced God’s New Life in a life-giving way? Perhaps whether you wanted it or not?

Maybe it happened through an unexpected forgiveness and new start in a relationship with someone, including God or yourself.

Maybe it happened through being made new and healed in some way, spiritual, physical, emotional.

Maybe you found transformation through the release from an addiction or bondage to an old way of living.

What are your stories of Christ’s New Life shaking up your world and sending you into a transformation of wholeness, hope, grace, even joy?

Sometimes these stories are simple ones of Spring with the green blades starting to peak out, the calves and lambs emerging, the warmer temperatures and deepening sunshine. Sometimes they are bigger events like the arrival of a new child or grandchild, a new puppy or kitten, a new love or new friend.

But sometimes the earthquake in our lives feels even more powerful and scarier, like a move to a new place, a healing from a lengthy illness or taking on a new and unexpected job. Like when I [Bishop Laurie] lost her teaching position in SD, came back to MT (home) to serve as an interim pastor, and suddenly found myself [herself] to be bishop. Total earthquake to life that happened when I [she] said, “Fine, God. You’re in control now” and just let go. It hasn’t been an easy shake-up and I’ve resisted – earthquakes do bring destruction after all – but finally it’s been a good one as older deaths died and new life emerged. And now I am [she is] experiencing Christ’s New Life in ways I [she] never had before!

So what are your stories of God shaking you out of an old death into New Life, new possibilities, hopes, ways of living that bring life rather than death to you and others?

Often we have to put on different glasses to see the New Life of Christ in our midst rather than being blinded by the old death this world wants us to be fixated on. So for this Easter Sunday and Season, you are invited to put on Easter glasses and look for Christ’s New Life in the world to see what God is doing to bring New Life. You don’t have to deny the reality of suffering and death or stop responding in love to it. But through lenses of faith in our God who brings new life out of death by rising from the tomb, you can choose to look for the New Life of God all around you and let it be your strength and guide. For God’s New Life is there, when we let go, come and see, and cling to Jesus’ feet as he shakes up our lives.

Christ is risen. He is risen indeed! New Life is yours now and forever. Alleluia and Amen!