

“So, What’s Next?”

Matthew 28:16-20/Isaiah 66:18-23

First Presbyterian Church of Sharon

April 19, 2026/3rd Sunday of Easter

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I. Introduction

The season of high school graduation is coming up. It’s a type of end or completion. Maybe it all began years ago with preschool. Then kindergarten. Then 12 years of school, one grade after another. It’s been 1st to 2nd, and 6th to 7th, and 11th to 12th. Everyone knows what’s coming. It’s predictable. You know what you’ll be doing next fall. You basically know what’s next. But then it changes; 12th grade to...what? What comes next?

What comes next? It’s a big change. You can’t go back to high school. Things are different. Life is different. You are different. So, what’s next? Is it a full-time job? Is it vocational school to learn a trade? Is it 2-year or 4-year college education? Or maybe it’s some time off to do a little traveling. The point is, you can’t go back. Life has changed. So, what’s next?

So, what’s next? Laura and I are getting married on July 11th. It will be a small immediate family wedding. We’ve been dating for over 3 years. I’ve got my home. Laura has her home. I’ve got my stuff. Laura has her stuff. I like midcentury modern design. Laura likes traditional and art deco. I have house plants. Laura has a 67-pound English Cream Golden Retriever lapdog, Nala. Laura has a red convertible. I have a black SUV (and a sports car). We each have our extended families.

So, what’s next after July 11th? It will be a big change. We can’t, and don’t want to go back to how it was before. Things will be different. Life will be different. We will be different. So, among many things we’ll be looking for is a house, our house. And there will be communication and compromise. Life will change. So, what’s next? A big change.

So, what’s next? Sometimes things happen that just change your life. You can’t go back. You have a baby. So, what’s next? You move to Los Angeles, CA, or New York City, NY, or Charlestown, SC. So, what’s next? You plan to retire in a year or two? So, what will be next?

“He is risen. He is risen, indeed.” It’s the message of Easter. It’s the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It’s the center of the Christian faith. So, what’s next? Do you just go back to how life was? Or does it change things? Or, maybe, it changes everything.

II. Text and Brief Exegesis

I can imagine a dialogue; a type of “after Easter dialogue.” Bill is going to help me with it. Remember, the question is; Jesus is risen, so what’s next?

Bill-1-So, the message of Easter is “Christ is risen. He is risen, indeed.”

Glenn-1-Yes, “risen, indeed.” (pause) You know I had left over ham and cheesy potatoes from Easter dinner that I just recently finished. Leftovers can last a long time.

B-2-Christ’s resurrection is God’s confirmation that Jesus indeed is God’s Messiah.

G-2-It was extra work on Easter, but I liked hosting Easter dinner. I just had to push dinner back to 5PM so I had time to get everything ready.

B-3-Christ’s resurrection is the victory of God over sin and evil and the demonstration of God’s power so that we can live new lives now.

G-3-Yes, new lives. (pause) You know it took me a few days to get my house straightened back up again; things picked up, all the laundry done, all the dishes put away. It’s sort of back to my old life now.

B-4-Christ’s resurrection is the promise of our own resurrection. Though it’s still a mystery, we trust in the power and love of God so that death is not the end, but resurrection and eternal life in the glory and wonder of God.

G-4-That will certainly be something. (pause) I don’t know if I’ll host Easter dinner next year. Laura and I will be married. So, we probably will. But I’ll just have to wait and see.

B-5-Christ’s resurrection changes everything. It changes how we live. It changes what we believe. It changes what we hope. It is the center of the Christian faith. Today is the 3rd Sunday of Easter. Easter is not just a day, but a season in the Church calendar. I think it’s a season so that we live into the great Easter hope.

G-5-Yep, Easter comes once a year. Now it’s over and we can just settle back into life.

B-6-Or not.

Easter; so, what’s next? The dialogue is a little ridiculous, but you get the point. Is Easter one of these big life events that changes everything? Certainly, the Christian faith believes it does.

During this season of Easter, from Easter Sunday to Pentecost Sunday, Bill and I will be preaching on the different resurrection stories. Last Sunday, Bill preached on Mark 16. And as he pointed out, the resurrection story there just ends mid-sentence. It’s as if Mark wants you to stare into the mystery and decide how you might finish the story yourself. No easy answers in Mark. The tomb is empty. What do you believe?

Today we're going to take a brief look at Matthew's resurrection story. And as I was pondering that story this week, it seems to me that Matthew's story raises the question: ok, Jesus is risen, so what's next? Here's the answer.

Read Matthew 28:16-20.

So, what's next? As Matthew tells the story of the risen Jesus' Great Commission, it is not just directed to the disciples. It is directed to believers who would become early Christian communities which become the Church who in 2026 includes the 1st Presbyterian Church of Sharon. So, what's next? Matthew (and Luke) clearly see that mission (in all its forms and ways) to all nations and people is what's next. It's time for that great vision in Isaiah 66 of people of all nations coming to believe and worship the one God. It's God's dream. Now's the time.

So, here's a few things about "what's next:"

Despite the experience of the mystery of the resurrection, disciples both worship and doubt. Perfect faith (if that even exists) is not a requirement for mission.

Authority for mission in this world comes from the risen Christ who has ascended to the right hand of God. That's a way of saying Jesus now acts with God's power and authority. Other authorities may at times appear to hold ultimate power in this world. But Matthew is saying that the risen Christ has that final power. So be bold and confident and hopeful. We don't need to make excuses to share in mission.

Disciples, or Christian learners and followers of Jesus, are formed by witness, preaching, evangelism (in words and actions), and discipleship. Salvation in Matthew's gospel is not a trophy or date or one time experience to claim. Rather salvation is traveling the way of Jesus day after day. It's a way of life directed by Jesus's teaching. Interestingly, there are 5 collections of Jesus' teaching in Matthew. That might correspond to the OT Pentateuch/Torah/Gen, Ex, Lev, Num, and Deut. That's 5 books. Perhaps Matthew is saying Jesus' teaching is the "new Torah." And salvation is lived in following it.

Disciples are baptized into communities of faith. Christianity is not an individual philosophy. Rather it is a way of life lived in community for encouragement, care, education, worship, and mission. Baptized "in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" would not have had the fuller theological understanding of the Trinity that would come in the Nicene Creed 300 years later. Rather in Matthew it is a statement that the one God has been experienced and revealed in Jesus Christ, and that same God is present in the Holy Spirit now.

And the great promise of God's presence with us in Jesus Christ that began Matthew is now the final word. In Mt. 1:23 we hear "and his name shall be Emmanuel, which means God with you." In Mt. 18:20 we hear it again, "where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there also." And then the final words of the risen Christ, "And remember, I am with you always, until the end of the age." Disciples don't believe and live and worship and learn and do mission

on their own. They have the community of Christians, the Church, where Christ is present, until the end of the age.

So, what's next after Easter? Is it "business as usual?" Is it figuring out what to do with the leftover ham? The risen Christ in Matthew says, "No, that's the small stuff. There's something much better than that. It's sharing in God's mission to the world." And in many ways the whole gospel of Matthew has been moving to these last five verses. That's what's next.

IV. Final Reflection

I got a call one Monday evening. It was from the son of a long-time church member and friend. A hospice nurse told him his mother would probably be "passing" in the next day or two. So, I went over that evening.

When I entered my friend's bedroom, she was surrounded by some of her family. When she saw me, she sat up. She then said, "I've got something I want to talk with you about." I smiled and said, "What would you like to talk about?" She said, "Death."

And so we talked about all human beings being part of the order of creation, so we all die. It's part of being a human. "But," I said, "as Christians we trust that the mystery of Jesus' resurrection is the promise of our own resurrection. There's a lot we don't know. But we do believe that nothing can separate us from God's love, not even death. So, we all die into that love. Death is a type of end, but not the end. Rather it's like a change, from something good and familiar to something better and new, something more." My good friend thought about that for a moment. Then she said confidently, "I believe that." And she laid her head back on her pillow.

We then talked about her life. We talked about the people in her life. We talked about being a wife and mom. We talked about all the organizations she belonged to and led that made the Shenango Valley a better place. We talked about her trips to different countries and cultures, and her appreciation of just how big the world really is. We talked about her leadership at 1st Church over the many years, how things had changed and how some things have not changed. I read a couple scriptures from the Bible, and we held hands and prayed.

"Make disciples of all nations." My 90-year-old friend and church member had spent a lifetime doing that in many ways. And the Shenango Valley and 1st Church are better because of it. That's what was next as she lived her faith; she was making disciples.

She passed away two days later into the love of God. She was ready for the change into something new and something more. That's what was next.