

**THE WOMEN APOSTLES OF MATTHEW:
AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF MATTHEW 28:1-10**

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Abstract

This short article is an exegetical study of Matthew 28:1–10 which opens the Resurrection and Appearance Narrative of the Gospel of Matthew. The arrangement of the pericope in between Mt. 27:62–66 where the chief priests and elders gather around Pilate to secure the tomb with a guard and Mt. 28:11–15 where the chief priests return to conspire with the elders and bribe the guards to propagate a false report depicts quite evidently the intention of the author to paint a contrasting picture of the faith between the reaction of the chief priests and guards on the one hand and the reaction of women disciples on the other. The pericope also stands in an undeniable parallelism with 28:16–20 which is an account of the appearance of the Risen Lord to the apostles and their commissioning. This contrast with the Jewish leaders and a corresponding parallelism with the ‘appearance and commissioning’ to the eleven disciples brings to light the characteristic features of the faith and discipleship of the women disciples.

A comparison with the Markan source of the narrative also further highlights the traits of the women disciples in Matthew’s Gospel. Matthew unlike Mark attributes a purpose for the visit of the women to the tomb, namely to encounter the Risen Lord. This is indicated by the verb ‘to see.’ Similarly, Matthew makes the appearance of a young man a glorious angelophany with apocalyptic details (28:2–4; cf. Mt.1:18–24). The angelophany and the subsequent mention of the guards shaking with fear to become like dead men in v. 4 makes the Matthean narrative significantly different from the Markan account. He creates awe at the magnanimity of the divine manifestation in Vv. 2–3 which explains the fear of the guards in V. 4. Matthew points to an important theological distinction between the reactions of the guards with that of the women in V. 8. Though both witness the angelophany the guards becoming dead with fear is an indication of negative response to the events while the women are more positive in their reaction although they too are afraid.

The women disciples in Matthew through their faithfulness serve as the essential link in the life of the eleven disciples who had deserted Jesus. Matthew has also deflected greatly from a tradition which held little esteem for the testimony of women (unlike Mark and Luke) and attributes credibility to the witness of the women disciples, thus corroborating their rightful title - ‘First Apostles’ or ‘Apostles to the Apostles’.

1. Introduction

This short article is an exegetical study of Matthew 28:1–10 which opens the Resurrection and Appearance narrative of the Matthean Gospel. After making a working translation of the Nestle Aland version of the Greek Text we shall situate this pericope in its context. The structure of the text will then be studied from the point of view of its literary characteristics. Subsequently a brief perusal of the sources of the narrative will help in making a comparative analysis with its Markan source. Such an analysis will point us towards the theological considerations of Matthew.

2. Translation of the Greek Text¹

Following is the literal translation of the Greek text of Nestle Aland 27th edition which does not vary significantly from the RSV translation except in vv. 6 and 7 where ἡ ἐ has been translated as ‘has been raised’. RSV overlooks the passive mood and translates the same as “He is risen”. The divine passive usage is more coherent with the narrative which makes the resurrection a divinely willed act of power.

<p>¹Ο ἐ ἐ ά , ἡ ἐ ú η ι μί ά ἡ άμ ἡ ἡ ι ἡ ᾗ ί ἡ ò ά</p>	<p>Now, after the Sabbath, at the dawning of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.</p>
<p>²ι ι ù μὸ ἐ ἐ μέ · ᾗ ά ί ά ἐ ù ῥ ι ώ ᾗ ú ò ί ι ἐ ά ἐ ά ù ῥ.</p>	<p>And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat upon it.</p>
<p>³ἡ ἐ ἡ ι ἐ ù ῥ ώ ά ἡ ι ò ἔ μ ù ῥ ò ώ ώ .</p>	<p>His appearance was as lightening and his clothing as white as snow.</p>
<p>⁴ά ò ἐ ῥ ó ù ῥ ἐ ί ι ῥ ι ἐ ἡ ώ ί.</p>	<p>For fear of him, the guards shook and became as dead men.</p>
<p>⁵ά ι ἐ ó ᾗ ἴ ἴ ί · μἡ ἴ úμ ἴ , ἴ ά ὄ Ἰ ῥ ò ἐ μέ ἴ ·</p>	<p>The angel said in reply to the women. You do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified.</p>
<p>⁶ù ἔ ῥ , ἡ ἐ ά ò ἴ · ῥ ἴ ò ó ὄ ἔ .</p>	<p>He is not here; for he has been raised just as he said. Come see the place where he laid.</p>
<p>⁷ι ù ἴ ἴ ἴ μ ἴ ἴ ù ῥ ὄ ἡ ἐ ά ò ῥ ῥ , ι ι ù ά úμ ᾗ ι ἡ ί , ἐ ἴ ù ò ὄ · ι ù ἴ úμ ἴ .</p>	<p>Now, go quickly, tell his disciples that he has been raised from the dead and look he goes before you to Galilee, there you will see him. Lo, I have told you.</p>
<p>⁸ι ά ῥ ù ά ò ῥ μ μ ί μ ά ó ι ᾗ μ ά ἔ μ ά ἴ ἴ μ ἴ ù ῥ</p>	<p>And they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy and ran to tell his disciples.</p>
<p>⁹ι ι ù Ἰ ῥ ú ἡ ù ἴ ἐ · ί . ί ἐ ῥ ἐ ά ù ῥ ù ó ι ú ù ῥ</p>	<p>And behold, Jesus met them and said “Rejoice”. They came up and grasped his feet and worshiped him.</p>
<p>¹⁰ό ἐ ù ἴ ó Ἰ ῥ · μἡ ἴ · ú ά ά ί ἴ ά ἴ μ ἴ ά ἐ ι ἡ ί , ά ἴ μ ὄ .</p>	<p>Then Jesus said to them, Do not be afraid, go announce to my brothers that they go into Galilee and there they will see me.</p>

¹ Translation done with reference from Barclay M .Newman and Philip C.Stine “A Translator’s handbook on the Gospel of Matthew” (London: United Bible Societies, 1988), 903.

3. Limitation

Mathew begins his account of the resurrection with two temporal markers, ‘after the Sabbath’ and ‘toward the dawn of the first day of the week.’ There is also a change of characters from the chief priests and the Pharisees in the preceding passage (Mt 27:62–66) to the mention of two women characters, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary in 28:1. The two closing markers limiting the text are the change of locale from ‘the tomb’ (28:1–10) to ‘the city’ and change of characters from the women to the chief priests (28:11).

4. Delimitation

The pericope begins the resurrection and appearance narrative of the Gospel and is placed immediately after 27:62–66 where the chief priests and elders gather around Pilate and secure the tomb with a guard. In the subsequent passage the chief priests return to conspire with the elders and bribe the guards to propagate a false report (28:11–15). The Gospel then ends with the appearance of the Risen Lord to the Apostles and their commissioning in 28:16–20. From this immediate context of the pericope, the following three sets of contrasts (IA = IB; IIA = IIB; IB = IIA) between the Jewish leaders and the disciples (both women and the eleven) can be deduced.

I

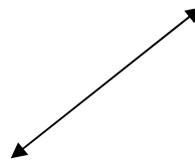
A. 27: 62–66

Jewish leaders
obtain soldiers to seal
& guard the *tomb* of *Jesus*

X

B. 28:1–10

Women disciples witness
an open and *empty tomb*
and are *met by Jesus* on the way



II

A. 28:11–15

Chief priests bribe soldiers to circulate false story X

B. 28:16–20

Jesus appears to eleven disciples
and commissions them.

In the first set, the contrast between the Jewish leaders (the opponents of Jesus) and the women (disciples of Jesus) is brought by the common setting of the tomb. While on one hand the Jewish leaders **seal the tomb stone** and place a **guard** (27:66) to ensure that **Jesus’ body** is not stolen (27:64) on the other hand the women disciples witness the **tomb stone rolled back** (28:2), the **guards dead** with fear (28:4) and the women meet the **risen Jesus** (28:9). Similarly in the second contrasting pair, we have the Jewish leaders using money (28:12) and their authority (28:14) to make the soldiers circulate a false story while the Risen Jesus using his divine authority (28:18b) commissions the disciples to spread his teaching (28:20). A third contrast can be drawn between 28:1–10 and 28:11–15 on the grounds that in v.10 we find Jesus commissioning the women while in vv.13–15 the elders commission the guards.

The two sets of narratives mentioned above not only bring about the contrast between the opponents of Jesus and the disciples but also correspondingly show the parallelism between the

events revolving around women (28:1–10) and the eleven disciples (28:16–20). Both the sets of disciples encounter the Risen Lord (cf. 28:9b and 28:17), worship Him (28:9b and 28:17) and both are commissioned by Jesus (28:10 and 28:19).

We can conclude that the pericope under consideration (28:1–10) is not only situated in the Gospel as the Resurrection and Appearance narrative but also fits into the wider context of the Gospel theme of rejection of Jesus by the Jewish leaders which began in 9:34. And in the bargain the pericope also highlights the traits of Matthean discipleship.

5. Structure

The following structural division can be assigned to the pericope.

Section I

28:1–8 - Events at the tomb

Section II

28:9–10 - Appearance of the risen lord

The two sections are held together by several formal features - (ἰ) ἰ stands near the beginning of each part (vv. 2, 9); ἀ appears in each (vv. 8, 10); and words having to do with sight are abundant: vv. 1 ('to see the tomb'), 2 ('behold'), 6 ('see the place'), 7 ('you will see', 'behold'), 9 ('behold'), 10 ('will see'). The passage is also united by the similarity between the words of Jesus and those of the angel in vv. 5-7 and in v. 10.

vv. 5–7: μὴ	ἴ	v. 10: μὴ	ἴ
ἴ	ἴ	ὁ	ἀ
ἴ μ	ἴ ὁ ὄ	ἴ ἀ	ἴ μ
ὁμᾶ	ἰ ἦ	ἴ ἀ	ἰ ἦ
ἐ ἴ ὁ ὄ ὄ		ἀ ἴ μ ὄ	

The repetition makes for emphasis. An additional unifying feature is the artistic correlation between the women and the guards. Both groups gather at Jesus' tomb (vv. 1, 4); both see an angel (vv. 2–5); both feel fear (vv. 4, 8); both leave the tomb in order to tell others (ἀ ἴ) what has happened (vv. 8, 10). And both are told by others what they should say (vv. 7, 10). The difference is that while the women tell the truth to the disciples (c.f. v. 11), the guards tell a lie about the disciples.²

6. Sources

With no significant textual variants in the received text we analyze the sources of the narrative. The pericope finds parallel in the other three Gospels. For the purpose of our study we

²W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 659.

adhere to the opinion of the majority of the scholars concerning the synoptic problem that Matthew relied on Mark and Q and also had access to his own specific Matthean tradition. Based on this presupposition we find that Matthew combines Mark's story of the empty tomb (Mt 28:1, 5–8; cf. Mk 16:1, 6–8) with events from his special tradition namely Jewish leaders requesting and obtaining soldiers to guard the tomb of Jesus (27:62–6), angel descending from heaven and rolling away the tomb's stone (28:2–4), and soldiers returning to Jerusalem and conspiring with the Jewish leaders to hide the truth of what had happened (28:11–15). Mt.28: 9–10 has parallel in Jn 20:11–18 which according to scholars come either from oral tradition or Mark's lost ending.

The special tradition of Matthew finds parallel in the apocrypha Gospel of Peter estimated to date between 70–160 AD. The Gospel of Peter finds mention in several works of antiquity - by Serapion, Bishop of Antioch, in 190 A.D.; Origen, historian, in 253 A.D.; Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea in 300 A.D.; Theodoret in 455 in his Religious History. Following is the translation of one of the fragments of the Gospel of Peter –

'Now at dawn on the Lord's Day Mary Magdalene, a female disciple of the Lord - afraid by reason of the Jews, forasmuch as they were inflamed with wrath, she had not done at the sepulchre of the Lord what women are wont to do for those who die and who are dear to them - took with her her female friends, and came to the sepulchre where He was laid. And they feared lest the Jews should see them, and they said, although we could not weep and bewail Him on the day when He was crucified, let us do so now at His sepulchre, that we may enter in and sit by Him, and do the things that are due? for the stone was great, and we fear lest any man see us. And if we cannot, even though we should cast at the door the things which we bring for a memorial of Him, we will weep and bewail Him until we come to our house. So they went and found the tomb open, and they came near and stooped down to look in there; and they see there a young man sitting in the midst of the tomb, fair and clothed with a robe exceeding bright, who said to them, Wherefore are ye come? whom seek ye? Him who was crucified? He is risen and gone. But if ye believe not, stoop down and look in, and see the place where He lay, that He is not here; for He is risen and gone thither from whence he was sent. Then the women fled affrighted.'

The above verses bear quite a few similarities with Mt 28:1–10 namely the mention of Mary Magdalene; the time of their visit which is more coherent with Matthew than with the other Gospel narrations; the description of the angel; the words of the angel; etc. Whether the Matthean tradition had access to this apocryphal work or vice versa cannot be ascertained considering the wide range of estimation of its date of origin. In any case, this apocryphal work further highlights the differences that Matthew makes to his narrative. Eg: the reason for the visit of the women and the reaction of the women upon seeing the angel are similar to that of Mark and hence different from Matthew. The difference with the Gospel of Peter thus gives impetus to our comparative study made in para 7 below.

7. Analysis of the Text

As mentioned above, we presuppose that Matthew has made changes to the Markan narrative and used his special tradition to serve his specific theological interests. We analyze these differences in order to grasp Matthew's theology. The major differences over Mk 16:1–8 are as enumerated below:

7.1 Chronological References

The two chronological notices in Mk 16:1 and 2 ('when the Sabbath was past', 'very early on the first day of the week'), refer to two different things (the buying of spices and the visit to the tomb) in Mark whereas Mathew mentions both chronological references -'after the sabbath' and 'toward the dawn of the first day of the week', only to the visit. The Jewish day actually began at sunset; it was the Roman day which began with sunrise. A vast majority of the translations apparently accept the meaning as represented in RSV – 'as Sunday morning was dawning'. But Matthew may well mean 'late on the Sabbath, at the beginning of the first day of the week.' If this is so then the events took place in the evening following the sabbath day and the scene is that of two women traveling in the darkness to visit the tomb. Thus Matthew's account would contrast with Mark's according to which the three women purchased spices at the end of the Sabbath day, but did not actually take them to the tomb until early the next morning. This can also be corroborated with the Gospel of Peter (cf. para 6 above). Though it is rather unlikely for women to step out in the dark in the cultural context of the times, Matthew's depiction which is contrary to the conventions of the time is coherent with the courage that women disciples have displayed throughout in his Gospel. (cf. 5:27-32, 15:21-28, 27:55, 27:61)

7.2 Number of Women

The exclusion of Salome in Matthew makes the number of women to be two vis a vis three women in Mark. These are the women who followed Jesus from Galilee during his ministry (27:55b), followed him during the passion (27:55a), and also sat beside the tomb (27:61). The mention of the same number of women in all these instances thus becomes a fitting connection for 28:1. On the other hand there are apparent discrepancies in the Markan account where in Mk 15:47 Mary Magdalene and Mary mother of Joses see where the body laid and later in Mk16:1 Mary Magdalene and Mary mother of James and Salome are said to come to the tomb. Matthew therefore irons out these discrepancies found in Mark.³ Therefore Matthew's intention to change the number to two (note that even Gospel of Peter mentions more than two women) is to bring out a logical connection.

7.3 Purpose of the Visit

In Mark they bring spices to anoint the dead body of Jesus while in Matthew there are no references to the anointing and spices. Some attribute their coming to mourning and great sadness (which is the reason given in Gospel of Peter). But as with 27:61, there are no descriptions of mourning behavior. One result of their coming is that they will be witnesses to the risen Jesus as they were to his crucifixion and burial. But the verse (v.1) attributes purpose to them, they 'went to see the tomb'. The use of the verb 'to see' offers a clue. The verb appears only in 27:55 and 28:1 and connects the two scenes. But verbs of seeing have been especially important in the Gospel. Having

³ Robert T Fortna, "Mark Intimates/Matthew defends the Resurrection," in *Forum*, Vol 10 (Sept –Dec 1994), 208.

‘eyes to see’ or ‘seeing’ are metaphors that denote understanding (9:2) or insight into Jesus teaching and experience of the reality to which it testifies (13:16–17; cf. 5:8). This quality divides the disciples from the non-comprehending crowds who do not see (13:13–15). These women have followed (ἀκολουθεῖν - a discipleship verb) Jesus from Galilee (27:55). They have had numerous opportunities, direct and indirect, to hear his teaching that he must die and also be raised (16:21; 17:22–23; 20:17–19). They have faithfully witnessed his accurate teaching about his crucifixion and burial. So now they come awaiting his resurrection. It is also to be noted that three times in these opening ten verses of Chapter 28, and once in the final scene, the verb “to see” denotes encountering the risen Jesus (28:6,7,10,17).⁴

7.4 Angelophany

In Mark the women wonder among themselves “who will roll back the stone” (Mk 16:3) and with a gap in the narrative we find the stone already rolled. Consequently the women plainly enter the tomb and see a young man sitting on the right side. Matthew omits the question of the women and makes the appearance of a young man in white a glorious angelophany with apocalyptic details (28:2–4). The story is said to be an angelophany because of the common elements (enlisted below) it has with other angelophanies like in Daniel 10 and more so in chapter 1 of the Gospel.

Introduction of recipients	28:1	1:18–20
Appearance of angel	28:2–3	1:20
Fear of recipients	28: 4, 8	1:20
Word of consolation	28:5-6a	1:20
Revelation/ Command	28:6b-7	1:21
Obedient response	28:8	1:24 ⁵

he angelophany and the subsequent mention of the guards shaking with fear to become like dead men in v. 4 makes the Matthean narrative significantly different from the Markan account. Only Matthew’s narrative clearly explains how the rolling tomb stone was opened. The ‘great earthquake’ introduced in v.2 by the typical Matthean attention seeking phrase ‘ὁ σεισμός’ accompanies the descent of the angel. One is instantly reminded of the earthquake that caused the rocks to split, tombs to open and the bodies of many saints who had fallen asleep to be raised in 27:51b-52. The largeness of the stone was already mentioned in 27:60 which prepares for the supernaturalism involved in its rolling back here in 28:2. The angel sitting upon the stone depicts an elevated posture of triumph. The stone (λίθος) which Joseph rolled (ἀποκύλησεν) before the tomb and which the guard subsequently sealed is now rolled back by a divine messenger (ἄγγελος).⁶ All these nuances of Matthew’s narration creates an awe at the magnanimity of the divine manifestation in v. 2-3 which explains the reaction of the guards in v. 4. They are said to be shaken with fear - the greek word *eseisthesan*

⁴ Warren Carter, “To see the tomb: Matthew’s Women at the Tomb” in *Expository Times*, Vol 107 (Oct 95):201-202.
⁵ Davies and Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*,660.
⁶ *Ibid.*,665.

(aorist passive) has the same root as the noun *seismos*,⁷ ‘earthquake’ in v.2 – thus bringing about a word play. The guards at the tomb were ‘all shook up’ inside by the violent earthquake. Note also that the guards become like dead men which brings about an ironical foreshadowing - at the tomb where Jesus’ resurrection is going to be announced in the following verse (v.6), the guards are ‘dead’ with fear. v.4 which is unique to Matthew points to an important theological distinction between the reaction of the guards with that of the women in v. 8. While both witness the angelophany the guards becoming dead with fear is an indication of negative response to the events while the women are more positive in their reaction although they too are afraid. Despite their fear the angel addresses only women not the guards. Just as in the beginning of the Gospel Joseph had been relieved of his anguish by an “Angel of the Lord (cf.1:20; 2:13,19) so too, these women will have their anxiety or alarm dissolved by a similar messenger.⁸

The angel’s message to the women explains the meaning of the empty tomb. The crucified Jesus whom the women seek is not in the tomb, a place of death. “He has been raised as he said” (28:6). And as a proof of this, they are asked to come and see the place where he laid. The phrase “as he said’ is a peculiar emphasis of Matthew which Mk 16:6 does not have. This phrase throws the spotlight on Jesus’ own confidence in his victory over death. At the final Passover meal as well as in his response to the High Priest during the trial, Jesus had confidently proclaimed his victory (cf. 26:29, 64). Thus the words of the angel subtly re assert and validate the prophetic knowledge that the Matthean Jesus had consistently demonstrated.⁹

7.5 The First Commissioning of the Women

Just as in Mark, the angel gives the women a mission in v. 7. However, the Markan account presents it as a promise. The phrase ‘as he told you’ is not repeated by Matthew even though at the last supper Jesus had made such a promise (cf. 26:32). Instead it is explicitly an announcement of the angel made evident by the Matthean formula-‘Lo! I have told you’. It prepares for the two appearances that Mathew narrates - 28:9–10 and 28:17–20.¹⁰

7.6 The Reaction of the Women

V.8 states that the women left the tomb quickly () with fear and great joy. The reference to the women leaving the tomb , “quickly,” corresponds to the angel’s command ù ĩ , “go quickly” (v. 7). Although the women had not overcome their fear (μ à , “with fear”), despite the exhortation of the angel not to fear (v. 5), they were simultaneously filled with ã μ , “a great joy” (cf. 2:10). There was no doubt in their hearts about the truthfulness of what they had been told about Jesus being raised from the dead, and they ran to tell the news ĩ μ ĩ ù ð , “to his disciples” (cf. v.10). à ĩ , “announce” or “proclaim (the news),” is used also in vv. 10, 11. This reaction is contrary to Mark where the women fear and say nothing. (Mk 16:8).

As mentioned earlier, V. 8 depicts a reaction that contrasts with that of the guards mentioned in V. 4 which leads to a corresponding contrast in the consequent action of the two.

Guards

Women

⁷ Ralph Earle, *Word Meanings in the New Testament* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 2000), 28.

⁸ Donald Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew* (Delaware: Michael Glazier Inc., 1985), 157.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Reaction	Fear and become like dead men (V. 4)	Fear and great joy (V.8)
As a consequence	Report to Chief Priests (V.11)	Go to tell disciples (V.11)

7.7 Encounter with the Risen Lord

Mt. 28:9–10 recounts the appearance of Jesus to the women, while they are on the way. This short Christophany sets forth the proper response to the risen Lord – ‘worship’ which has been a consistent response of many who positively encounter Jesus. cf. 2:2b, 2:11, 8:2, 9:18, 15:25, 17:14, 20:2.

Jesus’ words about Galilee repeat those of the angel. As there is nothing new in this commissioning many scholars dismiss this short resurrection appearance as a mere variant which has no real function in the narrative. But Janice Anderson notes that it is typical of Matthew to have double witnessing i.e a literary technique whereby the dialogue of one character is repeated by another in the Gospel. Eg. John’s words are repeated by Jesus - ‘repent for the kingdom of God is near’(3:1–12) or Peter’s confession “you are the Christ , son of the living God”(16:17) is repeated by the High Priest I adjure you that if you are the Christ, the Son of God (26:63), the words of the tempter (4:3,6) are repeated by the mocking passersby at the cross (27:40). By this technique there is either a link created between the characters, or it tends to reveal certain characteristics of one by similarities to another. Some reinforce characters’ reliability.¹¹ In this case, such a repetition not only creates a link between the words of the angel and Jesus but also reinforces the divine character and credibility of the command of the angels.

Furthermore, this brief scene also points to certain other Matthean theological characteristics.

(i.) First of all it creates a parallelism between the women and the eleven disciples to whom the Risen Lord will appear at the end of the Gospel - 28:16–20 (cf. Para 3). The two appearances evoke the same response from the women and the eleven and both entail a commissioning on the part of Jesus. Though there are differences in the content of the commissioning, one can clearly note that both these commissions bear equal authenticity on account of the one who commissions – namely the Risen Lord. While the eleven are instructed to make disciples of all nations, the women are asked to proclaim the news that ‘He has been raised’ to the disciples themselves thus rightly earning for them the title ‘Apostle to the Apostles’ or ‘The First Apostles’.

(ii.) Secondly, the appearance of the Risen Lord is a fitting reward for the fidelity of the women who had followed Jesus from Galilee and ministered to Him (27:55), stood by the cross of Jesus (27:55 even when other disciples had fled. Cf. 26:56) and witnessed his burial (27:61). This encounter would also be a just reward for the expectant faith they displayed in coming to the tomb to meet the Risen Lord (cf. 6.2 above). Moreover as substitutes for the disciples who were absent, these women serve as the reliable intermediaries who are to link the disciples with the reality of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection.

(iii) This encounter with the Risen Christ as the women are on their missionary journey fits into a consistent motif of the Gospel. The Risen Christ is present with his community and especially those

¹¹ Janice Capel Anderson, “Matthew’s Narrative Web Over and Over and Over Again” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series* 91, editor Stanley E.Porter (Great Britain: JSOT Press), 1994, 17–18.

who proclaim the Gospel eg: 10:40, 28:20, 18:20. Hence the message given by the Risen Christ to the women is a reassurance given to them in the course of their mission.¹²

(iv) The women's clasping of Jesus' feet not only reflects their response of worship but also underlines the reality of the risen body of Jesus: he is not a spirit. He is the same crucified Jesus who is transformed. There is thus the identity of the earthly Jesus as the risen Lord being explained polemically by Matthew. A further indication is that the women are not to rest with their old relationship with Him but are to proceed on the mission entrusted to them. This motif finds resonance in the parallel narration in Jn 20:11–18.

(v) Jesus' reference to the disciples as 'my brethren' (28:10) involves their reinstatement after their denial and desertion in the Passion. Jesus thus reconstitutes their fellowship and they are now again members of his family (cf. 12:49).¹³ Jesus' promise of reconciliation with the disciples who failed him, first made in the context of the Passover meal (26:32) is now reaffirmed by the Crucified and Risen Christ. Jesus takes the initiative to be reconciled with his 'brethren' just as he had taught his disciples to do on several occasions in the Gospel (5:23–24, 6:12, 14–15; 18:21–35).

(vi) In Matthew unlike in Mark and Luke the testimony of the women goes unchallenged and according to their instruction the eleven disciples would gather in Galilee to encounter Jesus (28:16–20). Jesus' Jewish contemporaries held little esteem for the testimony of women (*Jos.Ant.4.419; m.Yebamot* 15:1,8-10;16:7;*Ketubot* 1:6-9); this reflects the broader Mediterranean culture's limited trust of women's testimony, a mistrust enshrined in Roman law.¹⁴ Matthew has deflected greatly from such a tradition which finds support in the Markan and Lukan account which is in a sense quite revolutionary. Such a revolutionary outlook towards the role of women which could be a reflection of Matthean community is consistently displayed in the Gospel. Note the mention of 4 women in the genealogy, the various discourses on adultery and divorce (5:27–32), the role of the Canaanite woman in expanding Jesus' ministry to the Gentiles (15:21–28) and the mention of women during Jesus' passion where others failed.

(vii) Jesus' instruction for the disciples to go to the mount of Galilee bears connotations with 26:32. The promise that 'there they will see me' is fulfilled in v.16 where the Risen Lord appears on a mountain in Galilee. Galilee was the primary place of Jesus' ministry (4:23). It was the place from where his fame spread far and wide on account of which many followed him (4:24–25). It is only natural that the Risen Lord's instruction to his disciples to make disciples of nations be given at Galilee. Mountains too have theological significance in the Gospel. The first discourse of Matthean Jesus was on a mountain top (Mt 5–7), Jesus was transfigured on a mountain top (17:1), his instruction on the signs of the end of the age was given from a mountain top (24:3). And now the Galilean mountain top becomes the setting for his final instruction to the disciples, where he appears in all glory and authority (28:17–18) and promises to be with them till the end of the ages. There is a subtle resonance of Mt 5–7, 17:1 and 24:3 with 28:17–18.

¹² Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew*, 158.

¹³ Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew*, 159.

¹⁴ Craig S. Keener, "Matthew" in *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*, (ed., Grant R. Osborne; Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1997), 394-395.

8. Conclusion

The Pericope chiefly serves as the Resurrection narrative that concludes the Gospel of Matthew with the story of the empty tomb and the commissioning of the disciple. The confessional statement of the community “He has been raised” repeated twice in the narrative is the central message of the passage. However, it is worthwhile to note that unlike the other resurrection narratives such as in Luke and in John, in the Matthean account there is no attention given to Jesus’ changed appearance (Lk 24:16, Jn 20:14-16; 21:4), to his capacity to overcome physical obstacles (Lk 24:36; Jn 20:19,26), his eating with disciples as risen one (Lk 24:30, Jn 21:9-13) and his demonstration of his wounded humanity (Lk 24:39, Jn20:17,20,27). Which implies here identity of the risen one is not the concern.

The study of the immediate context of the pericope enables us to conclude that Matthew sandwiches 28:1-10 between 27:62 and 28:11-15. By this he lays two reports - the true and the false, two reactions - those who believe and those who do not, side by side. This emphasizes that the rejection that Jesus faced in his lifetime (beginning with 9:34) persists till the end. The unbelieving Jewish opponents of Jesus remain so till the end and even concoct stories to hide the truth (27:62-66 and 28:11-15). In contrast there are the believing disciples of Jesus (28:1-10 and 28:16-20) who encounter the Risen Lord and receive a divine commission from Him (28:9-10, 19-20) with a promise attached that He will be with them till the end of the age. (28:20). Matthew’s narrative technique depicts the motif of contrasting reactions also by placing the reaction of the guards(28:4) alongside the reaction of the women in the narrative (28:8).

Apart from the theme of rejection and belief, the appearances of the risen Jesus first to the women and then to his the eleven disciples which are the crowning events of the resurrection narrative also point to the traits of discipleship like fidelity, expectant faith, courage (not in terms of absence of fear but ability to overcome fear in carrying out mission), obedience to divine commands and an attitude of worship towards the Lord. This encounter with the Risen Lord finally culminates in the commissioning of the disciples.

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