

SEQUOYAH HILLS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“Testify: More Than One Reason”

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Matthew 28:1-10

April 5, 2026; Easter Sunday

What are the stories that inspire us forward? What are the narratives that shape our own sense of who we are? What are the messages we feel compelled to pass on?

One way or another, we all bear some witness as to what has come before us, to what stories have been given to us. One way or another, our lives, our words, our actions are our testimony. Question is what they testify to.

Obviously today being Easter Sunday there’s a particular testimony we are especially focused on, *the* testimony, the good news that, if true, reshapes our entire understanding of life and its meaning, its limits, its endurance and renewal, reframes how we consider our existence in light of the hope of the message of this day.

But still the question is, what will we testify to?

Let’s go to God’s Word together.

[Read passage.] The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.** Will you pray with me?

Gracious, Loving God, we pray for your presence anew this morning. In all the ways you have made yourself known, may you reveal yourself anew this day. By your Spirit, breathe your Word to us, and for the Word spoken and heard today, may it not be mine but yours. Amen.

Derek Redmond wasn’t expecting his father to show up in the way he did one day in 1992. He had already shown great resolve, but something changed when his father appeared alongside him.

See, Derek Redmond was a British sprinter. He showed promising athletic ability as a boy, and then by the time he was 15 he was breaking records in the 400m race for his age group in the county.

Then just a few years later in 1985, he broke the British record in the 400m, which began a sequence of success on the national and international stage in the 400m race and 4 x 400m relay.

In his early life, his father Jim Redmond played a prominent role, guiding him and supporting him. But it wasn’t always easy. Jim had immigrated to the UK from Trinidad and Tobago, made ends meet working as a driver then in sales for a meat-processing center, eventually going into business on his own. He called his company J. Redmond and Son, even though his only son Derek never joined him in it. Derek, of course, was focusing more and more on his athletic career, and Jim was ever supportive, though it did mean they were not always able to be with each other or share the same path.

Derek was part of the gold medal winning British team that won the 4 x 400m relay at the 1986 European Championships, positioning him to be a part of the British Olympic team and was considered a strong contender as a medalist for the 1988 Games in Seoul, South Korea.

Then just minutes before his opening race in Seoul, Derek tore his Achilles tendon and was forced to withdraw from competition.

Part of Derek's testimony, he would share later, was coming to grips with his dreams being dashed and plagued by injury at what should have been the peak of his career. He resolved, however, to get back into shape to compete in the Olympics again.

The women at the tomb had experienced no shortage of setbacks and grief in the days leading up to the encounter we consider today, what became the substance of their testimony. Their teacher, their Lord had been betrayed by some of their own. He had been falsely tried, convicted, beaten, and crucified, all while they had hoped he might be the one to restore so much of what had been broken in the land and for their people.

Now all there was to do, it seemed, after resting on the sabbath, was go back to the tomb where they had laid his body.

Interestingly, Matthew is the only Gospel that records the women actually seeing what happens next, that is, early in the morning, an angel of the Lord descending, terrifying the guards who afterward seemed like dead men, and rolling away the stone at the entrance of the tomb. In the other Gospels, it appears this has already happened before the women arrive, but in Matthew, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary see it all go down.

So then the angel turns to the women and tells them, "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."

That message, that good news, that Jesus was alive, that the cross and the grave, though they had seemed to have claimed victory, were overcome in the end, and now as a result of this new life, this new hope, everything was different. This was the message these two women were given, and it gave them, as it puts it, "fear and great joy."

And this is the message they carry as they leave the tomb, and by every indication fully intending to make good on the task entrusted to them by the angel.

And on the way to see the disciples, Jesus himself meets them. The only thing it seems that could make them pause in their mission, their determination to carry this message was the Messiah himself, and they stop, take hold of his feet, and worship him.

Then Jesus gives them the message to carry on, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

And the part that has stood out to me lately is that when it comes to the substance of their testimony, that is, the message, the mission they were entrusted to carry and bear witness to, nothing had changed. If we look closely at what Jesus told them to do, it was pretty much identical to what the angel had told them to do. "Jesus is alive. Go tell his disciples to meet him in Galilee." Same message. Same resolve. Same fear and great joy.

What's more is there's no indication that the women were wavering in their determination before seeing Jesus. They were going quickly with fear and great joy to do exactly as the angel had told them. Then after they saw Jesus, they went to do the same thing.

Now of course, they had seen Jesus alive in the flesh and that's not nothing. They could bear witness as to what they had seen with their own eyes, but still there's nothing to suggest they still harbored doubt beforehand.

All that's to say, in terms of what the women were entrusted and empowered to carry on, the message was the same, and their determination was the same.

But by grace, God it seems was showing them in more than one way; by grace giving them more than one reason to believe and step forward.

No one could question Derek Redmond's determination either. Between the 1988 Olympics and the 1992 Olympics he endured 8 surgeries and recovery and rehabilitation to get back to shape to compete on the world stage. And everything looked promising.

In 1991, his 4 x 400m relay team won the gold at the World Championships, so as he came into the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, there were high expectations for him to compete for a medal after his disappointment four years earlier.

In the opening heats of the 400m race, he posted the fastest time, qualifying him for the semifinals.

Then as the starting gun went off for the semifinal race, Derek was off to a good start, but about halfway through, he felt a sharp pain in his leg, as if he had been shot he later said. He had torn his hamstring, and instantly he knew he had suffered another injury that would dash his Olympic medal dreams, all that work and recovery down the drain. He crumpled to the track in pain and sadness.

But the determination didn't diminish. He got back up, clearly in pain, limping along the track to finish the race he had started, the world watching. He would finish what would be his last Olympic race. This would be a part of his story, and he knew that.

Then rushing up behind him came his father Jim, who had been watching from the stands, but upon seeing his son in such pain and struggle, ran past the officials and security and came alongside his son.

Derek later shared that his father told him, "You don't have to do this. You don't have anything to prove," but he said, "I'm going to finish," to which his father said, "Then we're going to finish this together."

So in what would become an indelible moment in Olympic sports, the father helped his limping son to finish his last Olympic race.

Derek's determination didn't change, but he was given more than one reason to finish the race. And that race, ironically enough, a race in which he was technically disqualified, a race he was not fit to finish on his own, a race the standings would say he finished last, would become what he is best known for, a central part of the story he would have to share.

The story we celebrate today is perhaps one you have heard before, or at the very least one you are familiar with. Jesus rose from the dead. The tomb is empty. Maybe you know the gist of it. Maybe it has shaped your life already, filled you with purpose, identity, determination, hope that your life will no longer be defined by what you can prove on your own, by what you can achieve, because you know that no matter what, a God who loves you

has already given all for you, poured himself out for you, and has carried you home already. Maybe you've already embraced that.

Or maybe that's a story you've intersected any number of times, and maybe you've been hurt, set back, any number of ways along the way, and it's been all you could do just to recover, maybe even muster up enough reasons to come through the doors of a church again.

But like the message given to the women at the tomb, sometimes God gives us more than one reason. Sometimes God gives us more than one glimpse into new life that can shape the testimony we can give. For the women, only minutes passed it seemed, between the angel's message and Christ coming alongside them himself. For others, the timeline may feel longer. For you, maybe years have passed since you've last felt the presence of God at your side or anything remotely feeling like new life at work within you.

Yet still the calling remains, that invitation to step into a story that could define you, not by your achievement, but by what God has achieved, for he comes alongside you and says, "You don't have anything to prove to anyone anymore."

And maybe today is the day you hear that in a new way. Maybe today is the day all the ways, all the reasons God has given you all come together in shaping a faith in the risen Christ, in a way that finds you recognizing you're in a race you cannot finish on your own, in a way that opens your eyes to the Savior who comes alongside you and gives you a life, a message, a gospel not meant just for holding on to but for passing on.

Twenty years after the fateful race in Barcelona, Derek Redmond had transitioned, among other things, into the speaking world, sharing his story, his testimony of the lead up and impact of the race he finished last. But in 2012 the Olympic Games came to London, including the traditional relay of the Olympic torch. Among those selected to carry the torch was none other than Derek's father Jim, for since the race in 1992, that finish in the 400m semifinal had become an indelible image of determination, empathy, sportsmanship, and fatherly love.

So in this instance, Jim Redmond carried the torch.

And perhaps for you this Easter, you might be given one more reason to let the Lord carry you and to let his strength be your story.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.