

## **On watch**

Matthew 27:62-66

April 20, 2014

*On the Sabbath, the chief priests and the Pharisees met with Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember that while that liar was still alive he said, 'I will be raised to life three days later.' Give orders, then, for his tomb to be carefully guarded until the third day, so that his disciples will not be able to go and steal the body, and then tell the people that he was raised from death. This last lie would be even worse than the first one."*

*"Take a guard," Pilate told them; "go and make the tomb as secure as you can."*

*So they left and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and leaving the guard on watch.*

They put a seal on the stone and left the guard on watch. On watch. Standing there, day and night, night and day, guarding a tomb. Guarding against what?

Against the body getting out? No. There was no way a dead body was going anywhere on its own. They didn't have to guard against that.

Against bodysnatchers getting in? Yes. That's what they were worried about. They were worried that some of the dead man's disciples would break into the tomb and steal the body.

So what? What does it matter what becomes of a dead body? But it wasn't the body they were worried about. It was the lack of a body. They were guarding against the false claim that the body was gone because it had been raised from death. They were guarding against this lie, the lie that Jesus is alive, and this last lie, they said, would be even worse than the first one.

And what was the first lie?

He was the first lie: everything about him, everything he said and everything he did.

When he said, "The kingdom of heaven is near," they knew it was a lie.

When he said that those who acknowledge their own spiritual poverty are happy because the kingdom of heaven belongs to them, they knew it was a lie.

When he told them that they were hypocrites because they fastidiously followed their own meticulous rules, while neglecting God's rules, justice and honesty and mercy, they knew it was a lie.

When they asked him, "Is it against our Law to heal on the Sabbath?" and he said "No" and then healed a man, right there, on the Sabbath, they knew he was a liar.

When they saw him healing the sick, welcoming outcasts, forgiving sinners, opening the door to God's grace to everyone, opening the door to God's love to anyone, they knew he was a liar. His claims were too good to be true. He was too good to be true.

And that's what they had to guard themselves against, against something too good to be true. They would not be duped. They would not let the lie be believed. They were on watch!

We are on watch. We will not be duped. And so we guard ourselves against disappointment, against false hope, against anything too good to be true, against anything too good. And so we very carefully and very effectively guard ourselves against joy!

Isn't it true? Have you seen it done? Have you done it yourself? Sabotaged your own joy? Refusing to believe the good right there in front of your eyes? Looking for any flaw, any defect, any cloud behind the silver lining, any storm lurking just over the horizon? Happier to be right and unhappy, than to be wrong and happy?

Why do we do it? Why are we so afraid of joy?

For one or both of two reasons. We are afraid of joy because we are afraid that we will not be able to hang on to it, that we will not have what it takes to sustain it, and so we believe it better never to have had joy in the first place, than to have to bear the grief of losing it.

Or we are afraid of joy because we are afraid that if we let ourselves be too happy, fate or destiny or the gods, or God, will come back to bite us.

But that is giving ourselves way too much credit and God way too little.

It's not about us. It's not about anything we are or anything we can do or anything we can't do. Joy doesn't come from us. It's not in our power to create it or sustain it. It's not about us.

It's about God. It's about what God gives. It's about what God chooses to give. It's about what God does. It's about what God finds delight in doing. It's about what God did.

And this is what God did. God gave them what they were most afraid of. God gave them something too good not to be true. God gave them the gift ... of being wrong!

Because the last lie is no lie at all. Jesus is alive.