

Easter Sunday

April 5, 2026

The Rev. Amanda Gerken-Nelson

Early, early in the morning this past Thursday, there was an earthquake in Northern California

According to the New York Times it was a 4.6 magnitude quake and it struck around 1:41AM with an epicenter just between San Jose and Santa Cruz<sup>1</sup>

Some of you may recall that I did my masters out in the Bay Area and my internship was in a suburb of San Jose

I experienced my first earthquakes while living out there – they so rarely happen here

I recall a 4-something earthquake when I was living in Berkeley and how it sounded like a train was rolling down my street and a big trash truck had struck my building or something and then just as fast as I noticed it, it was over

It's unnerving

On Thursday morning, a friend of mine who lives in this area of California wrote a Facebook post about the experience:

“Fun fact about earthquakes you learn when you live in an earthquake area,” Anne wrote, “there are different kinds.

“We have small ones all the time. A quick jolt that sounds like a cabinet falling. A short vibration that feels like a weak massage chair. Light swaying

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2026/04/02/us/earthquake-california-tracker.html>

that you only notice on the upper floors of buildings. Many times, only one family member even feels it.

“Last night there was a 4+ with a close epicenter that vibrated the room for a good 20-30 secs. Everyone in the house was suddenly wide awake at 2am. Shocking but no damage.

“The most significant one I remember from the last 20 years,” Anne continued, “was about 15 years ago. That one was waves that you could literally see rolling through floors.

“Long story short- we are all fine. Just tired for lack of sleep.”

Well, early, early in the morning many, many years ago Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, who was likely Mary Jesus’ mother, experienced an earthquake that also jostled them unexpectedly

Matthew writes: “After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And 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.”

I’d love to read Mary Magdalene’s Facebook post about that quake

Something like: “Fun fact about mysterious wonders you learn as a disciple of Jesus, there are different kinds.

“Some are small like turning water into wine at a wedding. Some deeply meaningful like curing the sick, and none of us expected he could raise Lazarus from the dead. Many times, only a few of us are privy to witness Jesus’ miracles.

“This morning, there was a whopper – as Mary and I went to the tomb, the earth shook and trembled for a good 20-30 seconds, enough to get our attention! And when we looked up, the stone was rolled away and an angel

sat on top of it and told us Jesus is risen! We actually bumped into Jesus as we ran to tell the others!

“Long story short – we’re all fine. Just tired for lack of sleep.”

Matthew is the only gospel writer to include an earthquake as part of both his telling of the Good Friday events – “The earth shook, and the rocks were split,” he wrote, after Jesus breathed his last – and Matthew includes the earthquake this morning in his resurrection narrative and it’s a great add

If you’ve ever experienced an earthquake you know how unnerving and attention-getting it is – if you feel the ground tremble below you and you pay attention!

It’s a great addition to the story even if you’ve never experienced an earthquake but have only seen them on the news or read about them in books – they evoke such powerful imagery of being unsettled

And, metaphorical earthquakes are equally disorienting, and my guess is we’ve all experienced one of those earthquakes

Whether the ground trembles due to negative disruptions like war, health scares, or emotional uncertainty or the ground shakes due to positive disruptions like starting a new job, moving to a new town, or overcoming a hardship, the effect on us is similar: a combination of fear and joy

And this is precisely Mary and Mary’s reaction to the earth-shaking experience they had early that Easter morning – “they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy,” Matthew tells us, “and ran to tell his disciples.”

I think it’s a bit easier to understand how our response to our ground being shook by positive disruptions might result in feeling both fear and joy

I remember getting home from the hospital the first night with our son and my ground shaking as I both quivered with glee at his arrival and trembled in fear that now I was responsible for this precious little life

But, how is it that joy could accompany the negative earthquakes – how could bombs in Iran, drones in Ukraine, tragedies in Sudan, fear in the hearts and homes of our immigrant neighbors here in Maine evoke joy?

Fear? Yes!

Joy? How?

I'm sure Jesus' disciples asked themselves the same thing all those years ago – how can anything good come from the earth-shaking and shattering death of our friend, our teacher, our hope, our deliverer?

Should we just throw in the towel and give up? give in?

For Mary and Mary, their earth shook – it quaked on Friday as Jesus died, and it SHOOK that early Sunday morning – and it shook because the stone was rolled away

The rumbling, the shaking they experienced that early morning was the power of God rolling away the stone and daring us – inviting us – to look inside the empty tomb

“Do not be afraid;” the angel said, “I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised”

There was a great earthquake, and we now know: Christ is risen!

The earth trembles, and we now know: Death does not have the last word!

The earth shakes, and we now know: the Empire does not win!

The ground we walk on might feel like it's crumbling, and we now know: God is not done redeeming the world, hope lives!

Jehiel Curry, the Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America proclaimed in his Easter message: "God's promise offers reassurance and hope. The resurrection does not deny disruption – it meets us within disorder and disturbance. The stone is rolled away. Death does not have the final word...we are Easter people. Even when the ground below us is shaking, we will not grow weary. We know that Jesus is our foundation. Christ is risen, and that truth strengthens us. It gives us courage to live, to hope, and to proclaim joy."<sup>2</sup>

Fear and joy are our companions in this Easter journey – the ecstasy of the empty tomb doesn't negate the horror of the cross, rather it emphatically reminds us not to give up on God's promise of grace, not to give up on the hope of God's kingdom, and not to give up on God because God has not, and never will, give up on us.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cpw7B04grqY>