



“Solid Ground”  
Matthew 28:1-10  
Easter Sunday April 5, 2026

Rev. Amy Miracle  
Broad Street Presbyterian Church  
Columbus, Ohio

It was March 27th, 1964, when the second biggest earthquake ever measured at the time, 9.2 on the Richter scale, struck Anchorage, Alaska. 115 people died. Houses turned upside down or skidded into the sea. There was no light or power in the city and for a time, virtually no communication with the outside world.

If you have ever experienced an earthquake, you know that they are uniquely unsettling. I was a young adult at a conference in southern California when I experienced a relatively tame one. I will never forget watching the sidewalk roll towards me. It was profoundly unnerving.

The Anchorage earthquake was all that and more. Fifty years after the events, the then mayor of Anchorage said:

Even now I can look at the solid ground out the window and know that it's not permanent. It can change anytime. It just moves. Everything moves.<sup>1</sup>

We know that, don't we? The world is unpredictable. Take the weather. (image 6) The last month, it has been unsettling to say the least. Temperatures in the 80's one day, in the 40's the next, thunderstorms, incredibly high winds. And that's just the last 24 hours.

Oh, life is unpredictable. Things change. Sometimes slowly. Sometimes all at once. The car crash. The diagnosis. And the earth shifts under our feet. The rug is pulled out from under us.

I have that experience many a morning when I take in the news. So much is happening. So fast. So many mornings, I see the headlines and my first response is: What? Huh? No. What?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/chance-anchorwoman-great-alaska-earthquake/> I am using excerpts from this podcast throughout the sermon.

Taking a slightly longer view, think of all of the things that were unimaginable a decade or two ago that are now a reality. Drones. Self-driving cars. Artificial intelligence. An American pope. A return of the measles.

Things that seem to be settled and fixed change.

The Gospel of Matthew understands that. Matthew's account of Easter begins with an earthquake. This version acknowledges how shaky the ground is beneath our feet. Easter takes place in an environment where the ground is literally shifting.

And that is... well...frightening. Fear saturates Matthew's Easter story. The guards are afraid. The women are afraid.

How do we survive such things? How do we find our balance in a world that refuses to stay the same, where so much is unpredictable.

Back to Anchorage on that March day in 1964. The quake hit just before the sun went down. With the power out and snow falling, there was no way for folks to tell just how badly their world had been jumbled. There was a feeling of vulnerability and dislocation.

Into all that came the sound of one voice, the voice of Genie Chance. She was a wife and a mother of three and a radio reporter for local station KENI. When the earthquake hit, she was driving and first using the radio unit in her car, she went on air. Here are the first words she said:

It has become obvious that the earthquake that struck Anchorage less than an hour ago is a major one. We urge each and every one of you to seek shelter, check your emergency supplies, and ... check [in on] your neighbors...It seems like it's going to be a long cold night for Anchorage, so prepare to batten down the hatches and stay tuned to KENI.

Genie quickly became the only source of information for frightened residents. Her voice was calm, informative, helpful. She was on air for thirty continuous hours, took a 2-hour break and then she was back at it for another twenty-nine hours.

She just kept talking. Reminding the anxious citizens of Anchorage that they were not alone. And soon other radio stations picked up her broadcast. It became the only way information got out of Anchorage. Here are some of the messages she shared on air:

- The boy scout troop that went overnight to McHugh Creek, Bill Noble would like to get a message if they are all right.
- We have word here that Mary Sweet is asked to contact her mother. Mother is at home.
- Mr. and Mrs. Dick Fisher are still at police headquarters waiting for any word of their children.
- Howard Forbes would like it to be known that he is OK.
- A message to Kenneth Sadler. Mrs. Sadler is fine.

Her calm steady voice reassured a city in turmoil and confusion – connecting them to the rest of the world and to one another. Reminded them that their story wasn't over. Reminding them that they were not alone.

She helped people find their footing once again. That's what we need this Easter. And that's what we get from our Easter story.

The Gospel of Matthew assumes that we live in a world where the ground can shift under our feet. That's the world in which Easter arrives. The first witnesses to all of this are women, the Genie Chances of their day. Like her, they are undeterred by an earthquake. They take in all that has happened – the ground shifting, the stone moved, the empty tomb and then they go to work - sharing this story, getting the word out. Like Genie, they share messages:

- The tomb is empty.
- Jesus is alive.
- Meet up in Galilee.

What messages do we want to get out into the world this Easter 2026? What messages do we want to share to help all of us find more solid ground?

- You are not alone.
- God sees you, hears you, values you.
- Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- Death does not have the last word.
- When you feel the ground shaking, lean into community, volunteer at a food pantry.

That last message is oddly specific.

Monday morning, I was at church early, working on my sermon. I was in a bit of a swirl – resurrection, earthquakes, solid ground, Anchorage, Columbus. Let's just say I was getting a little lost in the empty tomb. Then I saw an email from Kathy Kelly-Long, the director of the Food Pantry. Entitled "help needed," it was sent to church staff. It read:

Yikes - we had three volunteers call off today... If you have any time before 10:30 we would be glad for your help.

I stopped ruminating and went to the food pantry. For the next hour, I helped some of our neighbors get the food they need to get through the week. I got out of my head and into my body which is where we find solid ground. It's found in our life in the world. It's found through simple acts of human connection. That's how Easter gets into our lives and out into the world.

Have I mentioned that the Anchorage earthquake happened on Good Friday? Late on Saturday, the day after the quake, Genie read a list of the missing and dead on the air. No one told her to do it, but there didn't seem to be anyone to ask for permission either. And the next day, she knew, was Easter Sunday. Some churches were severely damaged, and many others were darkened and left without heat. Easter worshippers gathered, not only in churches but also in garages and warehouses. Services were packed. Ministers talked about death and they talked about resurrection. And the ground beneath the citizens of Anchorage got a little less shaky, a little more solid.

I've thought a lot about those Easter services in 1964. What would I have preached if I had been there that Sunday? What words would I have shared with folks after such an experience? I might have said something like this:

We have a story big enough to hold all of this loss and fear and uncertainty. We have this big deep story of death and life and a God who does God's best work in darkness and chaos. Our story can handle earthquakes and buildings collapsing and power outages and streets disappearing. Our story acknowledges the reality of death, the pervasiveness of suffering, the depth of sorrow. And then our story goes even deeper - death isn't the end of the story, suffering does not have the last word, sorrow is surrounded with love. And, at the end of the day, we have each other to lean on. And we have God. Always, we have God. We know all of that because of Easter.

That's what I would have said in 1964. That's what I say today on Easter 2026. It all comes down to this.

Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed.