

“Do Not Be Afraid”

Sunday, April 16, 2017

Easter Sunday – Sunrise Service

 **Matthew 28:1-10 (NRSV)**

The Resurrection of Jesus

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.

His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.

For **fear** of him the guards shook and became like dead men.

But the angel said to the women, *“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.”

So, they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “*Greetings!*”

And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him.

Then Jesus said to them, “***Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.***”

This is the Word of God for the people of God.

Thanks, be to God.

[MESSAGE]

My guess is that everyone here this morning has been afraid at some time in your life.

From fear of spiders, to fear of the dark, to many different phobias, we all fear something.

Maybe our worst fears center around fear of pain, fear of loss, or fear of death.

I would think that being confronted by an angel from heaven on your morning walk might frighten us just a bit.

It would also be a little scary to run into somebody who died in front of our eyes a couple days ago.

I think it's natural for us to be afraid sometimes.

We are vulnerable; we are not super heroes.

There are lots of things that can hurt us.

I think this story is talking about **paralyzing fear**; the kind of fear that caused the soldiers to *"become like dead men."*

The Bible talks about two different kinds of fear.

The first is fear of the Lord.

This is not bad thing; in fact, it is encouraged.

This is really about **reverential awe** of God's power and glory.

It is also proper **respect** for God's anger and judgment.

Fear of the Lord brings many blessings and it helps form the basis of our relationship with God.

The second form of fear is detrimental to us and is discouraged.

This is the "*spirit of fear*" that overcomes us and blinds us to God's love and betrays our trust.

1 John 4:18 says, "*There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear...*"

We must learn how to accept the love God offers to get us through the things we fear.

The events leading up to this morning when the women arrive at Jesus' tomb have been traumatic.

They have watched as their beloved Rabbi was taken, beaten, and executed.

They have reason to believe the same fate might be waiting for them as well.

They fear the unknown of what will happen now that Jesus is no longer with them.

Now, this morning, they arrive at an empty tomb where Jesus ought to be.

They now fear that his body has been taken away. Add in the appearance of an angel, and you've got a lot of fear in the air.

The angel immediately tries to help by saying, "*Do not be afraid.*"

Now, I understand that it's easy for him to say that.

But, we need to realize that God has been reassuring his people throughout scriptures.

These women are accustomed to hearing God tell them not to be afraid.

This is why they can listen to the angel's message and go back to their friends to tell them what has happened.

This is why the Bible says they, "*left the tomb quickly with fear and **great joy.***"

Despite their fear, the women were filled with joy because they knew that God was truly in charge and they trusted him.

Then when they encountered Jesus and he repeated the message, “*Do not be afraid,*” they were able to overcome their fear and worship him.

They did not let their fear paralyze them because they trusted God.

The great gift of the Resurrection for us is that we do not need to fear either.

When you are told you have cancer, fear overwhelms you until you begin to trust God and hear those words, “*Do not be afraid,*” being whispered in **your** ear.

If you lose your job, you can be paralyzed into inaction unless you pay attention to, “*Do not be afraid.*”

Each of us can, at any moment, be thrust into a situation that will cause us to be deeply afraid.

Once we have learned to put our trust in God, we will no longer be afraid of the things that come against us.

I think that is one of the best gifts of the Resurrection.

Because Jesus overcame everything, we can trust that God will continue to help us overcome whatever happens in life.

There is great comfort and strength in those words:
“Do not be afraid.”

Listen to them.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**