

Easter Sunday
April 12th, 2020 (Year A)
Sermon Text: Matthew 28: 1-10
Sermon Title: "*I'm Afraid*"

I am afraid. Of many things: that this isolation from the corona virus will never end; that one of you will get sick, or Dave will, or I will, that I'll need a knee replacement in addition to the hip replacement I've already had; I'm afraid that arthritis, ovarian cysts, osteoporosis, planter's warts, carpal tunnels, clogged arteries, TIAs, and aneurisms are all lurking like trolls under the bridge as I move steadily and progressively into my old age. I am afraid that my friends think that I wear a little too much bling for a woman of my mature years, and snicker behind my back. I'm afraid that my dreams will fade, my energy falter, and, when my accomplishments are measured, I'll be found wanting.

We're all afraid of something. The guards at the tomb probably had the best reason to be afraid that first Easter morning. Pilate had been warned that there would be trouble, so he put professionals in charge, to keep peace among the dead and to make sure that the body wasn't stolen. First there was a great earthquake. I've only experienced one earthquake, and it wasn't a great one, but when the building I was in began to shake, I was paralyzed. A quick thinking woman in the meeting I was attending ushered our group outside to safety. I didn't confront the angel who appeared like lightning and then rolled back the stone and sat on it, but I do have a lot of empathy with those poor fellows. When the guards came to their senses, they were going to have a lot of explaining to do. How *could* they have lost the body? Their next performance evaluation wasn't likely to go well. Confronted by an angel and an empty tomb, they completely shut down. Face to face with resurrection life, they were as good as dead.

That happens to people sometimes. In spite of an amazing occurrence, we can miss what is, even if it is really good. The guards serve as a reminder to all of us about how fear can shut our hearts to the gospel promise of resurrection to eternal life and to resurrected living. Hear the Gospel message this morning: **Do not be afraid.**

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary didn't know about Easter, of course. They were simply grieving, wanting to be as close to their beloved Jesus as possible, even if he were in the tomb. They must have been afraid of the

earthquake and the angel, but different from the guards, they are at least open to the message that the angel gives 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.*

In the ancient world women were not considered reliable witnesses. It is so interesting that the angel gives them a message to take to the disciples, and then Jesus appears first to them. Perhaps this is just another indication of Christ's inclusiveness. Perhaps it is also that the women *are* credible witnesses because they have no expectations. Perhaps they are even skeptical because their hearts have been so recently broken. They had witnessed Good Friday's horror on Golgotha. What if it turned out that Jesus' body had really just been stolen? It would be cruel to tell the disciples something that wasn't true and would only add to their disappointment and grief. It's good to have an assignment when your mind is racing and your heart is full to bursting. Their mission is to go and tell the disciples what they have seen.

But before they can complete their assignment, Jesus just shows up. *Greetings*, Jesus says. The Greek word translated into English as *Greetings*, is a multi-purpose word like *aloha* or *shalom*, which means both hello and goodbye. At its root, however, it means *rejoice*. *Rejoice! Tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.*

Brothers. Not disciples. Not friends. Brothers. Jesus' disciples would have good reason to be afraid of the resurrection. After all, they had fled, abandoned him to face death alone. Would he say to Peter: *What have you been doing, Peter? Do you know me now?* Instead, Jesus calls them brothers, family. In spite of what they have done, or not done, they are still family. No hard feelings. No revenge. Jesus had come to gather his family, those who call him Lord.

What do you believe about the resurrection? Did you Zoom here this morning hoping for a word of affirmation amid a life of missed opportunities, love taken for granted, the monotony of a demanding job? We all yearn for affirmation that there is something more to our lives. Maybe this morning we can find it. Maybe we can find assurance that we will see again the loved ones we have buried.

The empty tomb itself is not proof of the resurrection. The empty tomb is a symptom of the resurrection, a telltale sign that God does interfere with human life and death. If God interferes with life, God also interferes with our fears and our disbelief. Easter asks the question: *Are we ready to have our fears and our disbelief tampered with, even dispelled?*

New life is scary. To come to a sealed tomb and find the stone rolled back and an angel sitting on it can be scary. To look for a corpse and to meet a living Christ can be *really* scary. To dig around in the sorrow of the past and to find a future can be scarier still.

Matthew's account tells us a great deal about how we encounter the Risen Christ. Galilee is, of course, a physical place: *Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me*, and Galilee is also a metaphor for everyday life. If you are seeking the Risen Christ, you will find him in your everyday life, in your own Galilee.

God doesn't just meet us in churches. God meets us in the world. God is always moving ahead of us, anticipating our doubts and fears, and surprising us with good news. Our assignment is to stay awake to the beauty and mystery of our own lives and to get out into the world and do the work of the Kingdom. Every step of the way, God's message to us is: *Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus. He is not here.....he is going ahead of you.*

So here we are, Easter morning of 2020. Jesus' words break open our lives: Rejoice. Rejoice for Christ comes back for you and me, every day, collecting each one of us as he did the two Marys, his brothers and sisters, the person on the top of your screen, on the bottom of your screen. All of us. **The secret of Easter is this: Joy trumps. Hope wins.**

We can leave our fears in that tomb the soldiers tried so hard to guard. Jesus took fear, sin, despair, and death to the grave with him, and came back without them. We are wrapped in the clothes of our baptism where our lives are hidden with Christ in God's grace. Our tombs are no more secure than Christ's proved to be. Nor are the graves of those loved ones we have buried. Go, then, into the rest of your life without fear and with the joy of Easter morning. Jesus goes ahead of you. Amen.