

+ Mark 16:1-8 + What Do You Have to Fear? + Easter Day + 12 April 2009 +

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

What are you afraid of? As tough and fearless as any of us might seem, every one of us has something that scares us. Maybe it's something like heights or spiders or clowns. Maybe it's something more serious—going to a hospital or undergoing medical tests. Maybe it's running out of money or losing your job or somehow being unable to pay the bills or put food on the table. Maybe it's rejection or ridicule. Maybe it's admitting the guilt of some sin you've committed recently or years ago. Maybe it's dealing with your past or facing the unknown future. Maybe it's the reality of death.

There are all kinds of reasons for us to be afraid, many things that make us shudder or keep us up at night, but in the Gospel lesson today, we find something we need not fear. In fact, what we hear in our lesson removes our fear. We hear about some faithful women who had plenty to fear, but the one thing that made them afraid, at least temporarily, was the one thing that takes away fear—the reality that Christ is risen just as he promised. So this morning in an empty tomb, we find the answer to that age-old question, **WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO FEAR?**

Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome were probably not known as fearless women. In the Gospels we hear how they followed Jesus. We hear how they observed his death and burial from a safe distance away, but there's really no indication that they were fearless. Then we come to our lesson and an early Sunday morning after Jesus died.

Oh, they had all kinds of reasons to fear. They could've feared the Roman soldiers, who guarded Jesus' tomb with the order to stop anyone from entering it. They could've been like Jesus' disciples, who hid behind shuttered windows and locked doors for fear of the Jewish religious leaders and the mobs they had stirred up. They could've been afraid of what they did not understand—why Jesus was executed and what would happen in the future. They could've been afraid of their own guilt like Jesus' disciple, Peter, who had publicly denied even knowing him just days before.

There were plenty of reasons to be afraid, but when the sun broke the horizon on the Sunday after Jesus' death, we don't find them afraid. Late the night before the women had **"bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body"** and finish the process for his burial. They wanted to show him honor one last time. When the first light of dawn broke on Sunday morning, the women got up and went out into the chilly morning air with robes wrapped tightly around them and heavy jars of spices cradled in their arms. With purpose, they hurried to the tomb. Surely they were nervous about going, but not afraid. Their sorrow for Jesus and desire to honor him overcame their nervous fear. One question, though, filled their minds and conversation as they traveled outside the walls of Jerusalem. **"Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"** It was very large and moved with difficulty into place on Friday night, then sealed and guarded by Roman sentries. Who would move it?

They knew where the freshly cut tomb was located, but when they entered the cemetery, what they saw caused the spices to slip from their hands. **"When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away."** A little fear started to creep in. Who had done that? The scene was abandoned. Where were the soldiers? The fear grew, but their curiosity got the better of them as they slowly stepped into the dark tomb. They peered inside and **"saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side"**. Where there should've been a corpse, they found an empty resting place with grave clothes neatly folded on top. Mark simply tells us, **"they were alarmed."** Put yourself in their sandals. How would you feel? Overwhelmed? Shocked? Afraid? Alarmed?

"Don't be alarmed", the angel told them. **"You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"** Don't be alarmed? Jesus has risen? Tell Peter what? Where is his body? Who are you? The women were almost beside themselves. They had witnessed Jesus' death and burial just three days before. He had suffered the awful punishment of death by crucifixion, after he had already endured beatings, floggings, ridicule and tremendous loss of blood. They had clearly seen him die. They had clearly seen Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus take Jesus' body down from the cross, quickly prepare it for burial and place it inside this tomb. Now this angel was telling them that Jesus rose from the dead and he's alive? What wonderful news, but almost too much to grasp in such a short time!

For these women, on Friday night with Jesus' burial, it was like they had gone from 60 mph to 0, but on Sunday morning, the tomb was empty and an angel was trying to tell them the best news of all, **"He has risen!"** Suddenly they were going 0 to 100 mph in an instant. Naturally this caused a blizzard of emotions—alarm, fear, joy, amazement. We're told, **"Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid."**

Afraid of Easter? Afraid of what they had just heard? Afraid that Jesus lives? Surely not, but the risen Savior had to remove their fear over what they had seen and heard, because it all seemed so unbelievable. Matthew tells us what happened next. **"So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. 'Greetings,' he said. They came to him, clasped 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.'"** Their fear was gone. All that was left was joy.

What do you have to fear? **Christ is risen!** Are you and I ever like those women? We can sympathize with them, because we've been afraid ourselves. Like those women, it sometimes seems like Jesus seems so far away, while our fears are always with us. Fear over money or your job or your family or your marriage or your health or a loved one's health or guilt or the reality of death—at times all that seems like it's going to overwhelm us. At times like that we're no different than those women assuming Jesus is still in his tomb. We can't hear his voice. We can't see him. What will we do?

Then amidst all that hell-wrought fear that threatens to overwhelm us, the trumpet call of Easter shatters the darkness with the sweet song triumph, the sweet song of that simple, blessed truth, **"Christ is risen!"** That simple truth destroys all that fear and gloom and sadness and death. The empty tomb and the angel of the resurrection say to our fears, **"Don't be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here."**

Don't you see? That's the only thing in the whole, wide world that really matters. Christ is risen! Jesus lives and **"he lives to silence all my fears."** When all those reasons for fear scream in your ears day after day, you can gladly proclaim into the darkness, "Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. His resurrection proves that he is God, the God who loves me and died for me. He is the God who bore all my sins on the tree of the cross, who died the death I deserved, who took my place in the tomb, and who rose again from the dead for me. Where's your power now, O Fear? If he conquered death, the last and greatest enemy, you can't touch me no matter what you threaten. I'm sure of it, because Christ rose from the dead for me **just as he promised.**"

When you start to get that little inkling of fear that just won't give up wondering, "...But how do I know he'll help me?", listen again to the final words the angel said to the loyal women, **"There you will see him, just as he told you."** Just...as...he...told...you! For three years, Jesus had repeatedly promised to rise from the dead. In fact, he had promised victory centuries before through his prophets like Isaiah, a promise we heard just a little while ago in Isaiah 25. So how do I know he'll help me?

Run to the empty tomb and peer inside! Gaze on the empty place where Jesus lay! Then behold the risen Christ who has kept all his promises. See all the promises fulfilled in the nail marks in his hands and feet. If he kept this one promise, the greatest of them all, then nothing will be too hard for him.

With a risen Savior like that, what do you have to fear? Are you afraid of the guilt of your sins? Peer into the empty tomb and see Jesus' assurance of his grace and mercy and forgiveness. Are you afraid for your health or income or job or family? Peer into the empty tomb and see Jesus' protection in life and death no matter what trials or crosses he might allow you to bear. Are you afraid of abandonment or loneliness or rejection? Peer into the empty tomb and see that because Jesus abandoned the tomb, he will never leave you nor forsake you. Are you afraid of death or unsure of what follows? Peer into the empty tomb and see Jesus promise of your own resurrection.

What do you have to fear when you have a risen Savior? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. The shroud of death has been destroyed forever. The victory is ours through our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus lives and we will too. Your tomb will be empty someday too and fear will be gone for all eternity as you gaze upon your risen Savior with your own eyes in your own flesh in the glories of heaven. Friends, we have no need to fear. Christ is risen from the dead just as he promised. Let me say it again. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.