

**+ Mark 16:1-8 + The Life of Christ Is the Death of Fear +
+ The Resurrection of Our Lord: Easter Day + 8 April 2012 +**

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

What scares you? What fills your heart with fear? What keeps you up at night? As tough and fearless as any of us might seem, whether we admit it or not, every one of us has something that scares us. Maybe it's something relatively minor like heights or spiders or clowns. Maybe it's something more serious—going to a hospital, undergoing medical tests, or getting a diagnosis you don't want to hear. Maybe it's running out of money or losing your job or simply failure. Maybe it's rejection or ridicule or being alone or vulnerable in an increasingly hostile world. 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.

We all have fears—things that make us shudder, things that keep us up at night, but in Mark 16, we find someone who deals with those fears and puts them to death. 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. You see, **THE LIFE OF CHRIST IS THE DEATH OF 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. They weren't fearless. So it's no surprise when we hear how fearful they were on the first Sunday morning after Jesus had died.

They had all kinds of reasons to fear. They feared the Roman soldiers, who guarded Jesus' tomb with the order to stop anyone from entering it with whatever force necessary. They feared what they did not understand—why Jesus was executed and what would happen to them in the future. Perhaps they feared their own guilt like Jesus' disciple, Peter, who had publicly denied even knowing him. Above all, they feared the possibility that Jesus really wasn't God if he had actually died. All these reasons left them in a cloud of anxiety and uncertainty, yet they didn't remain hidden behind shuttered windows and locked doors with Jesus' disciples for fear of the Jewish religious leaders and the mobs they had stirred up.

Fearing that he had been buried too hastily, the women had **“bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body”** and finish his burial. They wanted to show him honor one last time. So 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 packs of spices cradled in their arms. They hurried to the tomb. They were very nervous, but their sorrow for Jesus and desire to honor him overcame their nervous fear temporarily. One question, though, still filled their minds and conversation with anxiety 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 on Friday night, then sealed and guarded by Roman sentries. Who would move it?

When they approached the tomb, the women stopped dead in their tracks. With a look of shock, the spices slipped from their hands. **“When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away.”** Fear filled their hearts. Who had done that? The scene was abandoned. Where were the soldiers? Fear turned to panic and Mary Magdalene immediately ran back to the city to tell the disciples. Curiosity got the better of the others as they kept creeping towards 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? Terrified? Panicked?

“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...risen? Where is his body? Tell Peter what? He's going where? Who are you? The women were almost beside themselves. They had witnessed Jesus' death and burial just three days before. They had seen him suffer the awful punishment of death by crucifixion, after enduring beatings, floggings, ridicule, and great loss of blood. They had clearly seen him die. They had watched Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus take Jesus' body down from the cross, quickly prepare it for burial, and place it inside this tomb. Now an angel was telling them that Jesus rose from the dead, that he was alive? It was almost too much to grasp in such a short time, and their fear just wouldn't go away.

For these women, when Jesus was buried on Friday night, their lives had come to a dead stop, but now with the tomb empty and an angel trying to tell them, **“He has risen!”**, they were suddenly going 0 to 100 in an instant. Of course, this caused a blizzard of emotions—alarm, fear, joy, wonder. **“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 they still didn't realize that the life of Christ means the death of fear. The risen Savior himself 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.’”** (28:8-10) Their fear was gone—put to death by the living Christ. All that was left behind was joy.

What do you have to fear? Are you and I ever like those women? We can sympathize with them, because we've been afraid ourselves. As with the women, it sometimes seems like Jesus seems so far away, while your fears are always with you. 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 of that seems like it's going to overwhelm you. At times like that you're no different than the women assuming Jesus is still in his tomb. You can't hear his voice. You can't see him. Your fear just won't go away.

Then amidst all that hell-wrought fear that threatens to overwhelm you, the trumpet call of Easter shatters the darkness with the sweet song of triumph, the sweet song of that simple, blessed truth, **“Christ is risen for you!”** That simple truth destroys your fear, your gloom, your sadness, and your death. As you peer into the empty tomb, the angel of the resurrection responds to your 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.”** (*Christian Worship* 152:5) When all those fears scream in your ears day after day, gladly shout into the darkness, “Christ is risen! His resurrection proves that he is God, the God who loves me and who came into my scary world and faced my biggest fears. He is the God who bore all my sins, all my guilt, all my worry, all my fear 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 know it. 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 asking, “...But how do you know he'll help you?”, 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, even though his disciples never paid attention to his promise. In fact, he promised victory centuries before through prophets like Isaiah, a promise we heard just a little while ago in Isaiah 25(:8), that he **“will swallow up death forever.”**

So how do you know he'll help you? Run to the empty tomb and peer inside without fear! 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, of his full and free forgiveness for your every sin. Are you afraid for your health or your income or your 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 failure or 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' proof that one day your grave will be empty too.

What do you have to fear when you have a risen Savior? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. The life of Christ is the death of fear. The shroud of death has been destroyed forever. The victory is yours through your Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus lives and you will too. Your tomb will be empty someday and all that 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 because Christ is risen from the dead just as he promised. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.