

Easter April 16, 2017

Acts 10:34-43

Matthew 28:1-10

Fear of the Unknown

Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed! Let us rejoice for Jesus is alive and His Spirit is with us as we sing and praise God's holy name! Easter Sunday a day when we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. A day and a season in our Christian church year which calls those who believe that Jesus is living to live life without fear and to have hope beyond this life as we shall eternally live with Christ. The season of Easter is called the Paschal month and was originally named after a goddess *Eostre* from an Old English (Anglo saxon) tradition. The traditions was that during the spring paschal month, feasts were celebrated and observances of the celebration of new life began with the goddess of the dawn. Both Easter and Passover are celebrated in this Paschal month each having a significant impact on the Christian and Jewish faiths then and now.

What a difference knowing and having faith in Christ's resurrection means in one's life. Throughout Lent our theme has been "Freedom from Fear" and as first stated six weeks ago, in order to gain freedom from our fears, we need to name them. And today our focus is on the fear of the unknown for when think about Christ's passion and death—there is still people today who wonder or are uncertain about the significance of Jesus and his life, death and resurrection on human history or human future.

In the resurrection story fear plays a significant role because Matthew's gospel telling of what happened that first day of the week involves people who were truly afraid. It was dawn when the women Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. They were afraid that they would not be able to perform their tasks of anointing Jesus' body because the tomb where Jesus' body had been placed was sealed with a large stone. But as they were making their way to the tomb, a violent earthquake occurs and an angel took care of the stone which had sealed the tomb. The angel of the Lord had come down from heaven and rolled that stone. The angel sat down on it. The guards who had been on duty securing the scene shook with fear and they became like dead men—frightened, in shock and probably fainting. After all, their jobs were on the line, and who would believe them that an earthquake and angel had opened the tomb.

The angel tells the women, “Don’t be afraid. I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.” They went into the tomb- they saw that it was empty. The women then hurried away from the tomb—afraid yet filled with joy. What did this mean? Where was their teacher? Rabbi? Master? So they decided to run to tell his disciples what had occurred. But suddenly they met Jesus.

Jesus speaks to them and depending upon which translation you read of this text, he says, “Greetings” or “All Hail” or “Rejoice!” Or according to the Gospel of John, Jesus says, “Mary.” They were afraid at first—and then they realized that this really was Jesus right in front of them. They bowed down and clasped his feet and worshiped him right then and there. They probably were smiling and crying tears of joy. And Jesus said to them, “Don’t be afraid.” Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

Fear is all around us and it is both good and necessary and also frightening which often leads us to wonder about what all our fears mean. We face transition and change in our lives just as the world is changing so is our church. For when we think about life, it is filled with change and transition. Nothing stays the same two days in a row. We will never be able to recreate this exact moment again- for each one of us is here at a specific time in our lives and as a collective, we are still in constant movement. We celebrate first days, last days, and anticipating days all really with unknown futures. But what are we afraid of in our lives- this fear of the unknown?

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary knew what their task was that morning. After the Sabbath celebration was over, they wakened early the next morning and planned to anoint the body of Jesus which was tradition and custom as part of their mourning and grieving. Their purpose was challenged because they did not know how they were going to get in the tomb. Perhaps a gardener or caretaker would help them. Perhaps someone else. An earthquake occurs. When this occurred they must have been frightened, and then they encounter an angel! What can this mean? How can they overcome these fears? One word is spoken to Mary— Greetings/ Mary... And then all fear is gone, Jesus is alive.

The women are frightened but because Jesus is offering the reassurance, their fear is of the unknown. They have no way to understand and comprehend what they are experiencing so they are filled with fear. Jesus speaks peace into their fear. They clasp his feet and they worship him. But they don’t stay with him. Their fears are now gone so Jesus gives them a mission.

Jesus sends them into the unknown. They don't know what the disciples will think of their story of seeing Jesus alive. These two women are walking away from Jesus without really knowing what they will face as they go and see those men who had followed Jesus for three years. They don't know how afraid they will be in their company or as they tell this story. And will the disciples believe them? Mary Magdalene and the other Mary are truly walking into the unknown as Jesus has appointed them to be tellers of the good news.

But what is this fear of the unknown? As they leave Jesus in the garden, they are afraid but they have something important to do. Christ's mission to them was to tell the disciples that he was alive. The women were afraid and this fear that they had can sometimes be very difficult to describe because it is nothing more than a mental obstacle. More than often, it curbs an individual's ability to perform to the fullest in various walks of life. Every time an individual encounters an unfamiliar situation, the fear manifests itself, and prevents an individual from taking the right decisions in life. Usually, an individual chooses to run away from the situation, and in the process loses certain opportunities in life. There are times when an individual has to move away from his/her comfort zone to experience better things in life. The fear of the unknown prevents an individual from leaving his/her comfort zone. If the two Mary's were really fearful of the unknown would they have told the disciples about Jesus? But they were not afraid.

They went to tell the disciples to go to Galilee and Jesus would meet them there on the mountain. When they saw him they worshiped him; but some doubted. And then according to Matthew, Jesus commissions them and tells them what they are to do after he ascends into heaven. Jesus tells them to share the good news of Jesus' resurrection and they are to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. He also told them to teach others of what He has commanded.

Sometimes we forget why we are the church. But it is when we hear the passionate story of Jesus' life, death, resurrection we come to faith, to renew our faith, and to understand that this man who lived on earth- died and rose again for you. For you to live eternally in heaven because the creator loves you so much. We have nothing to be afraid of- because Jesus is alive and calls us to come to him, pray to him, walk with him and live for him. Through Christ's resurrection we are given hope that goes beyond the cross of death, and overcomes all fear. But are we understanding this new life made possible in Jesus? Which of your fears is Jesus speaking peace into you today? What mission is he preparing to send you on?

A Christmas we welcomed Jesus as an infant—and sang “O Little Town of Bethlehem”—with the words, “all hopes and fears of all the years, are met in Thee tonight.” Today on this glorious Easter morning we can sing Because He lives—with joy in our hearts knowing that Christ lives within us and guides us always. And “because He lives” all fear is gone and Christ holds your future if you believe and have faith in him.

Let us rejoice and praise God for giving to us Jesus His Son who overcame death, rising to new life for each one of us. Let us rejoice and sing “Because He Lives”.