

# Sermon for Easter Sunday

## The Resurrection of Jesus

**28** After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. <sup>4</sup>For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. <sup>5</sup>But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. <sup>6</sup>He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he<sup>[a]</sup> lay. <sup>7</sup>Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead,<sup>[b]</sup> and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." <sup>8</sup>So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. <sup>9</sup>Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. <sup>10</sup>Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

"Fear has no hold on us!"

why not say these words with me.

Fear has no hold on us.

The guards were overcome with fear. The women ran from the tomb with fear and great joy.

Fear is not the usual emotion associated with the Resurrection. Joy, yes, excitement, yes, enthusiasm amongst the people of God, absolutely. But fear seems like the antithesis of the resurrection, right?

The opposite of fear is acceptance, acceptance of a life in Christ, the opposite of fear is trust, trust in a God who is prepared to face death for the sake of his beloved, the opposite of fear is comfort, comfort from knowing that fear can have no hold on us. This is true because the

message of the resurrection is life – that through the death and life of Jesus Christ the debt has been paid for our sin, we are forgiven, that through the death and life of Jesus Christ we are a new creation. Notice how the resurrection took place at the dawning of not just a new day, but a new week, the eighth day! The first day of a new week of creation.

In Christ, because of his great sacrifice, and then his own triumph over death, the old life has passed, and the new life is here. Fear has no hold on us, death is not the end for us, the scars of our sin have been healed for us. Fear has no hold on us.

Fear has no hold on us.

But the fact that fear has no hold on us does not mean that fear does not exist.

The fact that both the guards and the women on Easter morning felt fear, in the very moments when Jesus was raised, shows us that even in the face of life, we can still experience fear.

Over recent weeks the coronavirus has exposed the fragility of many aspects of our society. Objects of our love and trust are crumbling before us. Universally held assumptions about security and permanence are proving false. All we can do is hide ourselves from the very communities that usually help us cope with such challenges. Fear is a very present experience for many, many people. I have felt it for myself and for others. And I'm guessing you have too.

Our fear is driven by loss, grief and anger. It is driven by fear for our health, disruption to our lives, loss of freedom, and a fear of detachment. It is understandable that we are feeling these things given the unprecedented events of recent weeks.

Although the events were different the emotions were the same for the women at the tomb. The intensity of the fear was palpable in the lead up to that first Easter morning. The disciples had scattered from the garden on the night before Jesus died, Judas gave Jesus up for money, and Peter had denied knowing Jesus three times – all done out of fear. Jesus underwent incredible torture, dragged through the crowds, bore the weight of the cross on his climb to calvary whilst onlookers taunted him. All instigated out of fear.

The sky went black, portents were witnessed, the temple veil torn in half, the earthquake. Jerusalem was filled with an hyper-tense feeling of fear.

And yet the women still came to the tomb. Somehow in their hearts they knew that their fear was countered by their acceptance of the Messiah, somehow suppressed by the trust they had in God the Father, and somehow repressed by the comfort they felt from being close to Jesus.

But as they left the tomb, having heard the good news from an angel of the Lord, they went with both fear and joy.

Fear does not easily leave us, but the good news is that there is great joy to be had in knowing Christ. Fear unchecked is debilitating, fear in the shadow of great joy is managed.

I love that joy is not simply a distraction from fear. It doesn't just pull our gaze away from the source of fear for a few moments. The joy that the gospel talks about is permanent, eternal and life changing. You see, joy isn't the same happiness – you know, the kind of happiness that comes from getting through a whole season of friends in one day whilst self-isolating, or achieving a total spring clean of the house whilst on lockdown, or producing a few tiktok dance videos from your back garden, these are good things of course but when we stop we are faced with the fear again, they only distract us from the fear rather than repress the fear.

In contrast, the joy from knowing Christ can make us happy for sure, but its affect is far greater than happiness. Peter writes in his epistle that the hope we have in Christ even though we may not see him with our own eyes leads to, he says, 'an inexpressible and glorious joy.

John the apostle writes, "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear."

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews explains that we are no longer beneath a mountain of fear, but a mountain of joy.

Paul even writes that in the face of great troubles his joy knows no end. He says in writing to his church in Corinth "I have spoken to you with great frankness; I take great pride in you. I am greatly encouraged; in all our troubles, my joy knows no bounds."

The German theologian Jurgen Moltmann expresses in a single sentence the great span from Good Friday to Easter. It is, in fact, a summary of

human history, past, present, and future: "God weeps with us so that we may someday laugh with him."

Fear has no hold on us.

Say it with me – fear has no hold on us.

You know Joy leads to courage, and courage overcomes fear.

In epistle of James it is written "Count it all joy, my friends, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

There is much courage being shown by our NHS workforce at the moment. Up and down the country women and men are putting themselves in harms way to help and care for the sick. Courage has led them to overcome the fear of catching the infection to help those most in need.

Joy allows the fear to aid you not hinder you. Managing fear leads to wisdom – for instance out of the fear of catching the virus, comes wise actions look like washing your hands, social distancing and self-isolation.

The same is true for our faith.

Proverbs 9:10 says "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

As they ran from the tomb, the women were still afraid, but their fear was no longer alone, and it no longer dominated. They departed from the tomb, "with fear and great joy". That is the difference Easter makes. Fear in a dangerous and confusing world is still appropriate. It is why we are maintaining social distance even on this holiest of Sundays. But the pandemic does not change the promise of joy that we proclaim. And so here is the nub of the matter.

In the passage from Matthew there are three things we can take away to help us manage the fear and not allow it to dominate.

The first words of the Angel at the tomb to the Mary Magdalene and the other Mary was "Do not be afraid."

Do not be afraid. Fear has no hold on us.

Maybe today you are feeling under a cloud of fear and worry – as the psalmist puts it, maybe you feel as though you're walking through the darkest valley.

Well the message of the resurrection, the good news of Jesus is that you do not need to be fearful. As the book of Nehemiah states "the joy of the Lord is your strength'. I pray that today you know his joy, that knows no bounds even in the face of great trouble. Maybe you'd like to talk to someone about how you're feeling, if that's the case and you don't have a Christian friend who you can talk to, then have a look on our website for useful numbers to call.

So, the first message is the message of the Angel. Do not be afraid.

Fear has no hold on us.

The second message is this, in times like these, when many of us are asking where God is in all this. I pray that we might be comforted by the truth that even the women at the tomb were asking the same.

The angel said to Mary "I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised... you will see him.

The Easter message is clear – if you are among the sick – Christ is risen and he is with you, if you are among the living but alone and fearful. Christ is risen and he is with you. If you are separated from loved ones by death, Christ is risen– he is with you. As Jesus stepped out of the tomb on that first Easter morn, he represents the promise that we too can step out of fear, and into joy, to step out of darkness and into light, to step out of the void and into life abundantly. Whatever the reason behind the question of where God is in all this, know that he is calling you, he loves you, he is reaching out for you with his arm stretched out. You just need respond and take that first step into a new life.

If this is where you are today. Then I encourage you to pray these words, and let us know so we can pray for you and with you.

Lord Jesus you are at my right hand, therefore I will not be shaken. My heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; and my body will rest in hope, because you have not abandoned me. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence. Today is a new day, and my life is your life, your life is mine. Amen.

Fear has no hold on us.

Say it with me – Fear has no hold on us.

The third message of the angel is this, "Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead." Rather than leaving them paralyzed with fear, and refusing to let them simply stand in awe, the Angel sent the women to be the first witnesses of the Resurrection. Like all Christians after them, they went forth as proclaimers of His victory over death. The mission of the Church had begun. Mary and Mary were the first apostles, the first carriers of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

In other words, the messenger commissions new messengers, and now you and I are recipients of that same commission. So, go share the good news in word and deed, in love and service, for the sake of the world that God loves beyond all measure. Now is the time when the world needs the service of love more than ever, be the good news.

Because fear has no hold on us.

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your disciples,  
'I am with you always'.

Be with each one of us today, as I offer myself to you.  
Hear our prayers for others and for ourselves,  
and keep us all in your care.

Christ be with us, Christ within us,  
Christ behind us, Christ before us,  
Christ beside us, Christ to win us,  
Christ to comfort and restore us.  
Christ beneath us, Christ above us,  
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,  
Christ in hearts of all that love us,  
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.  
Amen.