

"Do Not Be Afraid " Matthew 28:1-10

April 16, 2017

Easter Sunday (Festival service)

"Christ is risen!" (He is risen indeed! Alleluia!) That is our typical Easter greeting. We could greet in different ways: "Happy Easter!", "Good morning!", or even another one I'll tell you about later. But suppose we had the following Easter greeting: "Don't be afraid!" That would be strange, wouldn't it? Yet the angel at Jesus' tomb greeted the women that way – "Don't be afraid!" During Wednesday Lent services, we concentrated on Jesus' words from the cross. Many were somber. Some were sad. Now that Jesus has risen from the dead and is alive, what would be His first words for his followers? "I am alive!" "Peace be to you!" "Rejoice and be glad!" No – none of those. When the two MARYs have been to the empty and are on their way back to the disciples, they meet the living Jesus. And what does Jesus say? "Greetings! Don't be afraid!" This is such a happy day. Why all this talk about fear?

We may fear lots of things: heights, enclosed places, the dark, and so on. Some may claim to fear nothing. But I think we all fear death. We try to avoid death, prevent death, ignore death, or transform death into something good, but we can't. On Friday, we concluded our service with Jesus dead and in the tomb. That may make us afraid. If the Son of God died, how can we avoid death. The Bible says that we earn death for ourselves because of our sin – our rebellion against God's Law. God's Law forbids many bad things, but we just go on and do them. God's Law commands many good things, but we just ignore them and follow our own desires. Since the Bible says that all have sinned (not just church members or really bad people), that means each and every one of us will die. And that makes us afraid.

The two women in our text today were afraid because they thought they were confronting death. They had seen Jesus die on the cross. They had seen Jesus put in the tomb. Now they meet Jesus on the road. Wouldn't that frighten you. If you attended a funeral for a friend on Friday, saw him buried up in Highland and then met him walking on the street on Sunday, wouldn't you be afraid? They probably thought they were seeing a ghost. That may explain why they bowed and grabbed His feet. People believed that ghosts had no feet. By holding on to His feet, the women knew this was not a ghost, but Jesus truly alive. (Someone suggested a new Easter greeting because of this: "He has feet!" And the response, "He has feet indeed!")

Even though the women now knew that Jesus was truly alive, they were still afraid. What does Jesus' resurrection to life mean? When Jesus died, many of His disciples and friends had betrayed Him, denied Him, and deserted Him. Was Jesus angry? What would Jesus do now? Seek His revenge? Kill them?

We may be afraid for the same reason. When we die and face the living Jesus, what will happen? We assume that Jesus will be kind and loving, but why? We have denied Him, betrayed Him, and deserted Him. Will He be angry? Will He condemn us?

Jesus says to us, as He said to the women, "Don't be afraid!" Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead to life is to usher in a new era. Before that day, death was powerful and in control. Death always won because people always sin. On Good Friday, Jesus suffered and died to pay the price (charge) for our sin and to save us from the punishment for our sin. When Jesus said, "It is finished!", what did He mean? He meant sin was finished. Death was finished. Jesus had redeemed (saved) humanity from sin. Jesus had defeated death and destroyed death.

Three days later, on Easter, Jesus showed His victory. Jesus is the first person to rise from death to eternal life. Jesus had made Lazarus alive, Jairus's daughter alive, the young man from Nain alive, but their resurrection was only temporary. They all died again. Jesus rose again from death and the grave to live and never die again. Death has lost its power and has no control over Jesus

Jesus has removed our sin and cancelled our debt to God. All of our wrong doing has been forgiven. All of our failure to do good has been forgiven. All of our sinful words and all our sinful thoughts have been forgiven. God has declared us to be holy and acceptable to Him. That means

death has lost its power for us. Death no longer controls us. We have no reason to fear. We have no reason to be afraid.

Yet we still see people dying, even Christian people. What gives? That's why Jesus died, rose again, and showed Himself alive to so many people. He says, "Don't be afraid", and then shows why we should not be afraid. Jesus showed that, even though He died, He rose from death and the tomb to live and never die again.

We will do the same. We will experience death (if Jesus doesn't come again first), but death will not hold us and cannot hold us. We will experience death, but we will not stay dead. We will rise from death and the grave to live and never die again. Before Jesus' resurrection, death was the ultimate punishment for sin. Now, after Jesus' resurrection, death has become the gate we pass through to eternal life.

Jesus' words – His final "mini-sermon" for us this day is, "Don't be afraid." Easter does not mean an easy life without problems. Life will still be difficult. You will still suffer and have problems in this broken world. Death will still occur and you may die, too. But Jesus says, "Don't be afraid."

But Jesus' resurrection changes our perspective on these things. Trusting in Jesus Christ means forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness of sins means death has no power and cannot control you. Death without power and without control means life. And this life means no more death. It means life as God created it and as God intended in Eden: perfect life with God that lasts forever.

Easter is a happy day but it is more than just one day. We are not here just to celebrate a holiday. We are here this Sunday and every Sunday to live the Easter life. We heed Jesus' words and we are NOT afraid. We have Jesus' care and protection for our life here. We trust in Jesus' work on the cross and we are not guilty or troubled by our sins. We have forgiveness for all our sins and are at peace with God. We rejoice in Jesus' resurrection from the dead to life and we are not worried over any problem this world can give, even death. We have a life now that will never end but will result in perfect peace, continued comfort, and everlasting joy with God in heaven. Nothing – not even death – can ever stop that.

Christ is risen! (He is risen indeed, Alleluia!)