

## **Sermon: With Fear and Great Joy!**

Easter Sunday has always been very special to me and my faith life. I expect that it is the same for many, if not all of you here today.

It isn't your typical Sunday. Although it is filled with love and praise for God and his son Jesus Christ, like every Sunday, this day is different.

How can today not be something emotional, spiritual and life altering for us all?

The birth, life, death and resurrection of God's son, Jesus Christ leads us to this day of celebration of the foundation of our faith.

This is the day that all our lives were changed by the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Some 2,000 years ago, two women were by a tomb in the early morning. One was named Mary and so was the other. They knew Jesus well and had cried more than their fair share of tears upon his gruesome death. They had come to the tomb to resume their weeping.

But then the ground began to shake. The earthquake shook the women to the ground, the stone rolled away, and an angel descended from heaven, sitting almost casually on the stone that had been disturbed from its solid setting.

The Roman soldiers who were guarding the tomb froze because, let's face it, in a contest between an earthquake and a spear, the earthquake is going to win every time!

The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said.

Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you."

And so, the women left, we are told, "with fear and great joy."

I don't know about you, but those five words have gone unnoticed by me in recent years. But this year, this year those five words stand out to me. With fear and great joy. They stand out to me because today is a mixture - for us all - of fear and great joy.

This is an Easter Sunday unlike any I have ever experienced before. With the effects of Covid still lingering and affecting church "in person" attendance, the unruly state of the world, the closing of churches in every denomination, and the overall instability that surrounds us, my need for the fellowship and strength shared among us here today, is essential to the well being of my faith.

In many years gone by, we would be gathered in numbers to fill the pews, dressed in our Easter best, ringing bells together, and this room would be shaking with more than 100 people singing "Jesus Christ Is Risen Today" at the top of their lungs.

And then, many of us would retire to our homes to welcome family and friends over for an Easter meal.

But things have changed in our lives, and that causes fear. We feel fear because fear is the natural by-product of change.

I suppose the women at the tomb felt fear. Fear because of the trauma that they had been through. Fear because perhaps the stinging grief made what they had just seen feel too good to be true. And so, they ran from the tomb with a mixture of fear and joy, a curious concoction of emotions if there ever was one.

I suspect that we know what those women felt like.

Today there will be many worshipping in their homes, with the continued fear for health reasons. Even though we understand, it still feels unusual, and it feels sad.

We fear for ourselves, our communities, our elderly loved ones. We fear the loss of physical connection. And, friends, I'm here to tell you that that fear is alright. Fear is not a bad thing. Fear is a natural human emotion that is healthy.

But I have good news for you this day! Fear has never been too strong a barrier to prevent God's love from erupting into the world. Today, our fear is mixed with a double portion of joy because we've been reminded of something today: Resurrection does not depend on our worship to happen.

The resurrection doesn't have to wait for us to be in the same room to erupt into the world. The resurrection doesn't have to wait for the sanctuaries to be filled and sermons to be preached. The resurrection does not depend on us dressing in our Sunday best or even leaving our homes.

The resurrection doesn't need us to do anything, but believe. But we most certainly need the resurrection. And the resurrection is the most relentless force in creation. And that, my friends, is joyful news.

And while that may not do away with our fear, it certainly gives us something beautifully potent to hold along with it.

Joy and fear. Fear and joy. Today, these two emotions are locked in a beautiful dance with one another.

And such was the case 2,000 years ago when those women came running from the tomb to tell the disciples. But before they could reach them, they found someone else...or someone else found them.

Suddenly, we are told, Jesus met them, and they came to him. They fell at his feet and felt his flesh. You see, Thomas wasn't the only one who needed to touch Jesus to believe it. The women had to do the exact same thing. And, you know what, so would I!

They felt his feet and they suddenly understood that it wasn't just some cruel joke. They suddenly understood that he was real, that resurrection was real, and the Roman Empire wasn't as powerful as it said it was.

The women held their friend who then turned to them and said to them the same thing the angel said to them, "do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

And so, they did just that. You know something? Every time someone says that a woman doesn't belong in the pulpit, remember that the first Christian

sermon was preached by these two women, mixed with fear and joy, to Christ's disciples. These two women, mixed with fear and joy, preached to those men and to us today, that resurrection doesn't wait for anything.

So, I hope you remember this day that fear and joy are not mutually exclusive. I hope you remember this day that the first Easter had both emotions and that it's alright to have both emotions today.

But I also hope that you take comfort and wonder in the fact that the first Easter did not have a brass quartet or a big choir. The first Easter did not have people dressed in their Sunday best. The first Easter was an angel, some terrified Roman soldiers, two scared and joyful women, and the resurrected Christ.

Jesus stood there - resurrected, triumphant, and victorious.

Yet for all the impressive effects of this resurrection story, the resurrection is not merely an exercise of power on God's part. It is that, but more importantly, it is an act of love. It is an act of love on the part of God, who will not abandon Jesus to the grave, and will not abandon us to sin and death and despair. It is an act of love on the part of God, who took on the worst of our violence and brutality and refused to respond in kind. Instead, God responded with an act that made all things new.

And so, today, we raise our hallelujahs. We raise them from our sanctuaries and our homes, with or without all the bells and whistles that we are used to.

But, at the end of the day, it doesn't matter. Resurrection will come anyway. Resurrection won't wait for the coronavirus effects in worshipping to go away, because God doesn't make exceptions when God makes promises to us in our baptisms. Our baptism seals us into the life and love of God and God promises to snatch us from the jaws of death and say, "No, you're mine. And you always will be."

So, remember to raise your hallelujahs today however you can. No matter how big and no matter how small. Raise your hallelujah because Christ is risen. He is risen, indeed! Amen!