

## Matthew 28:1-10

### Fear of the Unknown

Twice in the last year when at special events in Toronto I was told that I am a story teller. The first was a minister who has known me for years, and as we were heading toward a dining room for dinner, she overheard me say to someone next to me that I do not have the gift to tell a story well. My friend whipped around and said, "Joyce, you are a story teller. I have always known you to be able to tell a story."

Then last fall I went to a preaching conference and decided to challenge myself by signing up for an addition workshop where I would preach one of my sermons for colleagues and a couple of conference speakers and be critiqued and hopefully affirmed. My surprise came when a conference speaker, who I really wanted to have give me feedback because of her storytelling ability said, "Joyce, you are a story teller!" Have you ever thought of honing that gift. Of course, the answer was no as I never thought of myself as a story teller. A rambler, yes. Someone who like to preamble every thought with five other thoughts, for sure. But a story teller, no.

Now the only reason I share this is that I don't think I would be someone that God would send to anyone to deliver a straight up message. Certainly not the kind of message that the angel in the Easter story did, as it was written in the Gospel of Matthew. That angel was more like the delivery man who shows up and throws a package on the front step and leaves. No fuss, just get the job done.

This angel was there to get a job done and get the message out. Turns out it was a rather terrifying entrance. There they are, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, at the tomb of Jesus. And no, we don't have more information on the "other Mary." Regardless, crucifixion and death have done their worst. It is final. Done and done. The life is gone from Jesus. There is nothing to do but grieve the fact that Jesus is not going to be a part of their lives anymore. Death has been victorious.

The tomb is closed up tight. Sealed with a large stone, too big for anyone to roll away easily. But just in case, guards have been put into place to make sure no one tries any monkey business lest anyone gets any big ideas and they somehow get the rock rolled away and the tomb open, then removing the body so that some story can be made up about how Jesus has risen.

Imagine this scene, and think how you may have responded. See if you identify with any of the characters. There are Mary and Mary, as we already noted, grieving and forlorn. As they are surely pondering the events of the last days, suddenly there is a great earthquake! No warning. Ground shaking. And what was happening but an angel of the Lord was descending from heaven. What does the angel do, but right in front of them

rolls away the stone that the guards were to make sure no one tampered with. With that kind of strength, this is no angel to mess with. The appearance of the angel is like lightning. Consider a lightening storm and the brilliance of lightening piercing through a dark stormy sky. What awe does that inspire in you? For many it also strikes fear as lightning is unpredictable and powerful.

The angel's clothing was white as snow. For those of us in Canada, we don't have to think back more than a few days to remember the beauty of the newly fallen snow. A lot of snow! It sparkles in the sunlight and reflects back any light in the darkness.

All of this is too much for the guards. The fear they felt in that moment shook them to their core to the point where they passed out. But the angel was not concerned about their well-being. This angel was on a mission. Get to the tomb...roll away the stone... and deliver a message, "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." (vv5-7)

For those of you who have been to worship here all through Lent you know that our theme has been about the times when Jesus said some version of "Do not be afraid." He said it to Peter when Peter realized that he was in the presence of Jesus on the beach after a great catch of fish. Jesus spoke these words to the disciples in the midst of a storm and to a father whose daughter had died but Jesus brought back to life. The words were spoken after Peter, James, and John witnessed Jesus' transfiguration and heard the voice of God coming from a cloud. And then it was a passage about hell where Jesus says to fear God, but reminds us that we were created in love and for love, so we need not fear hell as long as we remember and fear the one who created us and loves us, who desires life for us.

Today we first hear these words, "Do not be afraid" from the lips of an angel, but as the story progresses and the women leave on their mission to share the angel's message with the disciples you will note that now mixed with their fear is also great joy. That is of importance. That is significant. Life is not cut and dry, one way or another, this or that. It is almost always both/and.

Pastor and teacher David Lose, writes about it this way,

Isn't that a wonderful reminder that fear and joy are not opposites but, as with doubt and faith, can be experienced at the same time and, indeed, might be inseparable? Fear...seems quite frequently "in the air" these days and for all kinds of reasons. Jesus' resurrection does not spell an end to fear for those who follow him, but rather makes it possible to experience joy amid what might otherwise be crippling fear. Resurrection, that is, doesn't simply answer or end problems, but rather creates something new, and Christian faith does not remove us from the hardships, limitations, and challenges of this life, but creates for us

possibilities that simply would not be available had God not intervened, first in the raising of Jesus and again by entering into our own lives.<sup>1</sup>

The fear around this story is about the unknown. They come to the tomb where what happens after death is unknown other than the finality of it all. Then the women experience this unexplainable event with the angel and are sent into an unknown future. What does all of this mean? If Jesus really is alive, resurrection is truth, then, what now? What does the future hold?

Still the women went, with fear and great joy. Then went into the unknown of it all and on the way, Jesus met them. He spoke a word of greeting, they touched him. He was real, he was alive. Life after death was and is really a thing! They worship him and then Jesus said to them “Do not be afraid.”

And what have they to be afraid of?

Pretty much everything. They have seen death and they have seen resurrection. Both of those things can make one fearful. Not only that, they are women who have been given a mission. According to Matthew they were the first to witness Jesus. Women, the first to know and the first to be sent out to spread the good news of the Gospel.

And what is that Good News?

It is that death does not have the final answer. Resurrection comes through death and brings new life. Not only that, but Christ goes ahead of us into the world, goes before us into our unknowns. You see Easter is just a beginning. Easter is not an ending point, but rather a beginning that calls people into life! Death is real but it does not have the final say whether that be life after our physical death or life that comes from being transformed in this life.

Many of us are coming to this day with some or a lot of uncertainties and unknowns. We may come with fear and with trepidation around our lives and circumstances, our futures. I would hazard to guess that all of us are looking at the world with its turmoil, wars, refugees, power and politics, rising cost of living and have some fear for the future of our world. Some are walking with loved ones who are ill or facing death, and there are those who are grieving the death of a loved one or the loss of security in one form or another. There seem to be much one can be afraid of.

Once again quoting David Lose he writes, “Christ’s resurrection does not wash those realities away, it makes it possible to experience joy in the midst of them as God continues to create something new.”<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Lose, David. [Easter A: Proclaiming an On-Going Easter | ...In the Meantime \(davidlose.net\)](https://davidlose.net/easter-a-proclaiming-an-on-going-easter-...in-the-meantime)  
Accessed March 28, 2024

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

So we move into this day, into the days to come, with fear and with joy, with hope and courage in the midst of uncertainty and unknowns. We take our faith and share our hope in Christ and our certainty of God's love for all, and share it with the world. Like the women, we are called to let others know that Christ is risen.

May you go into this day, into your future, with joy knowing that Jesus Christ is risen today and that changes everything!