

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: Do Not Be Afraid

Lesson: Matthew 28:1-10

28 After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. ² There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴ The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. ⁵ The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you." ⁸ So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

(Slide 1) Happy Easter! What a precious greeting this is for all of us who have spent the 40 days of Lent meditating on Jesus' love and sacrifice. Our Lenten journey began with Ash Wednesday, and every Wednesday, we gathered at church to participate in Lenten activities and listen to messages, striving to draw closer to God. As we transition from Lent to Easter, let's say the traditional Easter greeting. When I say, "Christ is risen!," you can respond, "Christ is risen indeed!" Let's try it: Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!

Yes, today we have gathered here to celebrate the resurrection of Christ. Easter is a great and joyful celebration, and from the moment we wake up in the morning, our hearts are filled with excitement, looking forward to spending time with our families. So for us, Easter is a joyful and uplifting day. But when Jesus had died, and Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the tomb early in the morning, the emotions they were feeling were very different from what we feel today.

(Slide 2) Yes, in fact, Easter morning did not begin with joy. Because Jesus had died, His disciples were in sorrow, confusion, and fear. With those same emotions, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the tomb. They knew nothing beyond the fact that Jesus, whom they had followed and believed in, had died. That was as far as their understanding went. They were not able to imagine a miracle in their lives, or that Jesus would rise again. They were simply going to the tomb to mourn.

They carried sorrow in their hearts. They carried questions for which they had no answers—questions about why such things had to happen. They carried the heavy weight of loss, as if Jesus' death were the end of the story.

And perhaps—just perhaps—
we are not so different from them.

Perhaps in some ways, we have also come here today in a similar way.

Some of you came this morning with joy. But others came with heavy hearts—
carrying worries, carrying grief, carrying uncertainty, carrying things that feel unfinished... or things that remain broken.

Yet the resurrection of Christ comes precisely into those places. Not into perfection, not into certainty, but into fear and confusion—God brings resurrection into those very places.

When the women arrived at the tomb, suddenly everything changed. According to Matthew's Gospel, there was a great earthquake. An angel descended. And the stone was rolled away.

When we simply read the words of Scripture, it may feel like a quiet moment. But if we think about it even a little, it was not calm at all. The tomb was set in a rocky hillside. Because of the earthquake, the ground would have shaken violently. Rocks would have cracked, twisted, and fallen. The women who came to the tomb were not in a peaceful setting—they were in a dangerous situation, one that could have even threatened their lives.

However, what we must always remember is this: resurrection always overturns our expectations. When the change of resurrection comes, it always comes from places we could never have imagined.

In that moment, the women were thinking about Jesus' death. But God revealed new life. They were thinking about the end. But through that very end, God began something new.

We often think we know how things will unfold. We assume that the situation is already decided. So if this story were happening in our lives, we might say: the stone is too heavy, the tomb is too sealed, Jesus is already dead, and the story is simply over.

But Easter tells us: God is not limited by our expectations. Even now, God is still at work in our lives, rolling away the stones that blind our eyes.

The first words the women heard were simple: “Do not be afraid.” This is very important. Because even when God is doing something good—even when resurrection is happening—our first response is often fear.

We say we want change, but we are afraid of the unfamiliar. We are afraid of change itself. We are afraid of what will happen next. Our parish, too, is in a process of change, and within it, there are many complex and delicate emotions.

The guards at the tomb were so afraid that they became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid.” And the angel did not stop there. He gave them good news: “He is not here; for He has been raised.”

Easter does not immediately erase fear. But in the midst of our fear, God reminds us that fear is not the end, and that good news is waiting for us.

(Slide 3) The angel gave the women two instructions. The first was, “Come and see.” The second was, “Go quickly and tell.”

The first instruction was, “Come and see.” Friends, faith does not begin with blind belief, but with encountering what God has done. The women were invited to look into the empty tomb—to witness the reality of the resurrection. And then, they were sent.

“Go quickly and tell His disciples.” This is the rhythm of the Christian life.

Come and see, and then go and tell. We gather in worship to encounter the risen Christ, and then we go out into the world to share that hope. But we need to notice something here. The women went with mixed emotions. The Bible says they left with “fear and great joy.”

A life where fear and great joy exist together—this feels very much like our real lives. Faith is not always pure certainty. Sometimes, it is fear and joy together. And yet, what is important is that they did not remain where they were. They heard the message, and they went.

As the women were going, something amazing happened. Jesus met them. They did not meet Him at the tomb. They did not meet Him while standing still. They met Him on the way.

And the first word the risen Jesus spoke to them was, “Greetings.” In other words, “Is there peace in your lives?” And once again, He said to them, “Do not be afraid.”

“Do not be afraid”—this is the heart of Easter. We do not simply believe in an empty tomb. We believe in a living Savior who meets us. Friends, God meets us on the road we are walking. God meets us in our obedience. God meets us in our everyday lives. And when the women saw Him, they responded in the only way they could—they took hold of His feet and worshiped Him.

Friends, what does this story mean for us? It means that the resurrection is not just something that happened long ago. It means that the resurrection is still speaking and happening in our lives today. When we feel like hope is gone, God says, “The story is not over.” When we feel trapped behind the heavy stones of life, God says, “I can move what you cannot.” When we are afraid of what lies ahead, God says, “Do not be afraid.” And when we are unsure of what to do next, God gives us a simple calling: “Come and see,” and “Go and tell.”

Friends, Easter does not begin with certainty. It begins with faith taking a step in the darkness. It begins with women walking toward a tomb, not knowing that they were about to change the world. And it continues with us.

Friends, we are Easter people. Not because we have everything figured out, but because we have met the risen Christ. So today, hear this word of God once again: Friends, do not be afraid. He is not in the tomb. He has risen. And even now, at this very moment, God is meeting us on the way. So friends, let’s say: Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Amen.