

Easter Sunrise

Text: Matthew 28:1-10 (NIV)

¹After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. ²There 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. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. ⁵The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷Then 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." ⁸So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Theme: "Do Not Be Afraid"

There is nothing that we could fear more than the power of God. He created the universe and life itself. He has the power to give life and to take it away. Even more than that. He has the power to send us both body and soul to hell for all of eternity. We could be more afraid of God than of anything else that there is, but those who trust in Him always hear His comforting words, "Do not fear."

I. Without faith God's power is dreadful.

A contingent of soldiers was dispatched to guard Jesus' tomb. They were not expecting anything to happen, then suddenly there was an earthquake. The stone was rolled away, and the soldiers saw an angel sitting on top of it. They shook and passed out cold. Those soldiers saw the power of God without faith in Him. That is truly a fearful thing. It began their day with more fear than they ever experienced in their lives. To go through life without faith in God only gives us fear when we encounter His power and glory. It will especially give us fear when Christ returns in His glory. Hebrews 10:31 says that it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Revelation 1:7 says that the peoples of this earth will mourn when they see Christ returning in His power and glory. It is a horrible thing to stand against the Almighty God. The fear that this day began with shows just how dreadful God's power is for those who don't know His love for them.

II. But God comes to His people with those precious words, "Fear not."

The guards shook and became like dead men, but then the angel turned to the women and said, "Fear not." Then the angel had good news for them, "*I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen!*" They came to anoint Jesus' dead body, but God raised Him from the dead. Even death was not strong enough to hold Jesus. His power is so great that He conquered death. Then something amazing happened as those women left the grave. Suddenly Jesus was standing in front of them. They clasped His feet and worshiped Him. Again they were confronted with God's power that their risen Savior was standing right there. Jesus also told them, "Fear not." They ran to the disciples filled with joy that Jesus had risen from the dead.

This is a common theme in the Bible. When the angel Gabriel appeared to Zachariah to foretell the birth of

John the Baptist and when he appeared to Mary, they were both startled, but he said, "Do not fear." When the shepherds saw the angel on Christmas, they were terrified, but the angel told them, "*Do not fear, for I have good news of great joy that will be for all people, for unto you is born this day a Savior who is Christ the Lord.*" When the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water, they were also terrified. They cried out, "It's a ghost," but Jesus said, "*Take courage. It is I. Don't be afraid.*" When John saw Jesus in His glory in Revelation 1, it says that he fell at Jesus' feet as though dead. Then Jesus placed His right hand on him and said, "*Don't be afraid. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.*"

Whenever God comes to His people in power, He comes with His word of peace. We think of His commands and confess that we have sinned against them. God tells us to fear not for in Christ He has forgiven all of our sins. Think of how precious that gift is. We stand condemned. He tells us to fear not, because Jesus paid for our sins in full. We can live in the peace that all of our sins are forgiven for the sake of Christ. Through faith in Christ, we are clothed in His perfect righteousness.

We often live in fear of the evils of the world. Just as the earth shook that day, it often shakes in personal ways in our lives. There is heartbreak, tragedy, sickness, and so many things that we go through in this life. Yet, the Lord comes with His help and bids us to "Fear not." Isaiah 43:1 puts it this way, "*Do not fear; for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name. You are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; .. For I am the Lord Your God, the Holy One of Israel, Your Savior.*" In every time of trouble, God tells us, I am with you. Jesus would give this promise to His disciples when He met them in Galilee, "*I am with you always until the end of the age.*" Through faith in Christ, we have that hope in every situation that God will never leave us or forsake us. There is nothing to fear.

The final enemy is death. The most fearful part of this life is to leave it. We will meet Jesus in all of His glory. But there will be no fear. God's angels will bring us to His glory, and the Bible describes the time until the resurrection as a time of peace and rest. When the Lord does raise us, we will hear those blessed words, "*Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Take your inheritance...*" There will be no fear when Jesus returns for all who trust in Him. It will be the most wonderful day!

III. Those who trust in God have a different kind of fear of God.

We recently talked about this in Bible class. The Christian fear of God is the awe and worship that we give Him for all of His goodness and grace to us. Psalm 130:4 says, "*With you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared.*" In our text the women clasped Jesus' feet and worshiped Him. The Christian fear of God is when we hear those words of comfort, peace, and forgiveness, and we give God thanks and praise for all that He has done for us in our Savior Jesus Christ.

Without faith, it is a fearful thing to be confronted with God's glory, but when we know Christ as our Savior, His presence gives us peace and joy, and fills our hearts with worship of His holy name. May God give us that faith in Him, that we may have the good Christian fear of His name.

Amen.

**Pastor Don Hougard Benediction Lutheran Church
Milwaukee, WI April 20, 2014 Sunrise Service**