

Lectionary A April 16, 2017 Easter Day
Grace and Peace Lutheran Church, Evansville, Indiana
Rev. Roberta Meyer

Acts 10:34-43
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24
Colossians 3:1-4
Matthew 28:1-10

The Good News of Jesus according to St. Matthew, the 28th chapter from the Message Bible.

Thanks be to God

⁴ After the Sabbath, as the first light of the new week dawned, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to keep vigil at the tomb. Suddenly the earth reeled and rocked under their feet as God's angel came down from heaven, came right up to where they were standing. He rolled back the stone and then sat on it. Shafts of lightning blazed from him. His garments shimmered snow-white. The guards at the tomb were scared to death. They were so frightened, they couldn't move.

⁵⁻⁶ The angel spoke to the women: "There is nothing to fear here. I know you're looking for Jesus, the One they nailed to the cross. He is not here. He was raised, just as he said. Come and look at the place where he was placed.

⁷ "Now, get on your way quickly and tell his disciples, 'He is risen from the dead. He is going on ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there.' That's the message."

⁸⁻¹⁰ The women, deep in wonder and full of joy, lost no time in leaving the tomb. They ran to tell the disciples. Then Jesus met them, stopping them in their tracks. "Good morning!" he said. They fell to their knees, embraced his feet, and worshiped him. Jesus said, "You're holding on to me for dear life! Don't be frightened like that. Go tell my brothers that they are to go to Galilee, and that I'll meet them there."

This is the Good News for all of us.

Thanks be to God

What Do You Mean—Do Not Be Afraid?

This morning I came to church, feeling somewhat like these two women felt as they walked along the path to Jesus' tomb. I came mourning the death of a friend, and. I can imagine what that morning was like to them. I invite you to put yourself in that scene with them.

You are walking in the early morning, going to—his grave. You are distraught. More than that, you are confused and sad and angry and grieving. He is dead, Jesus, your close friend, your teacher, the one who promised to be with you forever—is dead. And he didn't just die. They tortured him and mocked him and nailed him to one of those crosses where they put thieves and criminals. And the buzz around town is that one of the last things he did was ask God to forgive

the very people who were killing him. How could he? And now, you get up the strength to come to his grave, just to be close to him. The “whys” swirling in your head.

Why did this happen?

Why did he let this happen?

Was he telling us the truth—or was this whole time with him a lie?

But you loved him so much. And—he loved everyone. Maybe that was his demise—did he love too freely?

Just about the time you get to the tomb—the earth starts rumbling and rolling under your feet. It nearly shakes the living daylights out of you! For some reason, you also see a bright flash of light, you blink to get your bearings. Oh, my God! Standing smack in front of you is some kind of glowing being. What in the world? An angel, maybe, like you heard that came to Mary and Joseph when Jesus was born? It—he, or she goes to the tomb and rolls the rock away from its entryway, then jumps up on the rock and sits down.

And what are the first words out of this fiery phantom’s mouth? “Do not be afraid…” Are you kidding? Look at those brave guards who were supposed to be protecting the tomb. They are scared to death—standing there like blobs of rock, why they can’t even move to run away. And you are told. “Do not be afraid!!!”

Then while streaks of lightning are shooting out all around this angel, words of hope come from its mouth. Is it possible? Is it true? Could Jesus really be alive? *“I know you’re looking for Jesus, the One they nailed to the cross. He is not here. He was raised, just as he said. Come and look at the place where he was placed.”* The angel shows you the tomb. It is empty.

“Now, get on your way quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He is risen from the dead. He is going on ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there.’ That’s the message.”

This day that was going to be spent grieving the loss of your dear friend has turned into something—different isn’t even the word for it.

Do not be afraid. Oh, that is easier said than done. But words of hope turn fear into power that keeps you from being frozen stiff like those soldiers. A feeling of joy replaces the grief. What’s left to do but go do what you are told. High tail it for those disciples. Wait until they hear what you have to say!

And maybe Jesus wants to make sure you don’t lose your nerve, so he meets you on the path. Whoa, now, are you seeing things? You fall to the ground, grab hold of his feet and start uttering words of worship and praise to him. Jesus reiterates. *“Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”*

Do not be afraid. Is that the message of Easter? God knows we can’t help but be afraid of things that happen. People are still being massacred because they are followers of Jesus. Last Sunday, *44 people were killed and more than 100 more were injured in two Palm Sunday suicide attacks at Coptic Christian churches in Egypt.* Earthquakes and natural disasters still strike when we least expect it. Enemies still plot. *Yesterday, North Korea failed at a missile launch.* Loved ones get sick and die. I spent several hours at the hospice center with Darlene Smith and

her family this week as she made her journey into God's arms. Horrible, senseless things happen right here in Evansville. We are all still mourning the tragic death of Aleah Beckerle. Our prayers go out for that family and that sweet young lady's soul. And *Last evening there was a scare at the West side Walmart here in Evansville. A suspicious package was found, the bomb squad was there.* Yes, we are afraid.

God knows these life happenings are frightening, and we are afraid. "Do not be afraid" isn't an order, rather these words are encouragement for us. This story in Matthew illustrates how God's message of encouraging hope makes a difference.

There are two groups of people in this story who are scared beyond scared. The two women and the guards at the tomb. The guards are frozen, left powerless by their fear because they don't have the hope of Jesus' resurrection. But the women, receive encouragement and are empowered to go tell the news for Jesus' resurrection to the disciples.

Fear without hope stifles us. It makes us useless. It keeps us from doing our work. People who live in fear with no hope in the future live like those guards, scared stiff, dead in their tracks.

Fear with faith in God's promises gives us power to go despite our fears and worries. And when we waver, Jesus meets us right where we are to give us a boost of encouragement. We are empowered by the resurrected Jesus to go tell the good news of God's love. When we look past our fear we see new life, resurrection.

What it boils down to is this very important Easter Message. Fear without faith renders us useless. However, Fear that bumps into Jesus along the path is resurrection, new life. All I can say about that is Alleluia!!!!