

**“Fear and Joy”**

Matthew 28:1-10

Rev. Dexter Kearny

Longview Presbyterian Church

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After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.

For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, “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.” So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

This week I ugly cried. I had tears streaming down my face. I had snot covering my mustache. I got that choked up feeling in your throat where it seems like you just can't handle one more thing. So when Liz walked into the room and saw that I was watching a youtube video, I think she was concerned. But these were not tears of sadness, they were tears of inexpressible joy. This week I cried as I watched a new program pop up from the beloved actor from The Office, John Krasinski. Over the last few weeks he has started his own "news program" called SGN or Some Good News. It is a program that reports on the ways that people are loving each other and caring for the deepest hurts in our society during this time of quarantine and isolation. They are only fifteen minutes long but both episodes left me wrecked. They had me in tears because they offered Easter Hope in the face of a world struggling to make sense of a global pandemic.

The two Marys from our text come to the tomb early this morning wrecked. Their friend and hope has been brutally murdered by the state. As they walked an earthquake shook the ground, an angel descended like lightning, and rolled back a gigantic stone. The guards who saw all this happen were left like dead men, wrecked by their fear.

The angel then says one of the most common phrases in the Bible, “Do not be afraid.” In English, these words sound like a command from on high. “*Do Not* be afraid.” Like fear is something that we have control over. Like it is not scratching at the back of our hearts and minds in this time of crisis and anxiety. Fear automatically rises up in us, our hearts start to race, our fight or flight reflex kicks in, our adrenaline starts pumping. Fear is a physical thing that is not so easy to just command away. This seems to be an impossible command to follow.

But these words, “Do not be afraid,” are not really a command at all. In the Greek they might better be translated as “There is nothing to fear,” or “You need not fear.” These words from the angel are supposed to be a reassurance rather than a command. They are meant to provide comfort in the midst of a terrifying situation. This calming presence comes from this angelic figure who rode lightning down from the sky, pushed away a gigantic stone, and then sat atop it nonchalantly, and then with true authority said, “There is no need for fear.”

So, with no need to fear, the angel instructs the women to go forward into their lives with reckless abandon. God’s power has overturned all expectations and understandings in our world. The stranger is now our neighbor. The unlovable will now receive love. Those in pain will receive tenderness. The brokenhearted will find community and care. Death is not the end of our lives anymore. **Jesus has**

**risen from the dead.** The pain, the suffering, the anxiety, the fear in our lives and our world are not ultimate.

And this is exactly why I wept this week. The pain is real. The fear is real. The deaths are real. But in the end, they are not ultimate. Somehow, someday God's love will have the final word. Everything else will end but not God's love. And John Krasinski, Jim from the Office, was the one who shared that good news with me this week. It was his passion to share the good news in the world, the people who are stepping up to help others, the sharing of joy over the internet and the phone, the examples of inexplicable love pouring out from all corners of our world. The one that jerked my heart strings the most was a husband singing Amazing Grace to his wife through the window while she was in the hospital recovering from surgery.

And as the two Marys ran quickly from the tomb, they were not cured of their fear. Fear did not leave them. But rather our text says "they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy..." Courage is not being without fear, but acting while fear is still present. This is our call in the midst of a global pandemic. To live with fear and great joy at the same time. To know the realities of our world and to hold them but to never ever give up the hope of new life. I continue to feel a deep fear for all those on the front lines fighting this virus, I am afraid for all those who

are at high risk of death from this disease, and I am so grieved to be isolated from my community. But I also feel deep joy seeing new people interacting, new ways communities are sharing love and support, and the way so many divides are dropping because of our changed lives.

Beloved children of God, the angel calls us to make sure that this hope-filled reality is known to each and every person including ourselves. You are loved. We are loved. They are loved. And not even death and sin and sickness and fear can stop love from growing strong during this time. In this church alone, I have seen new relationships blossom over Zoom, I have seen you all making and donating masks, I have heard stories of people being checked on regularly, and with all of that I see our church living through the fear with courage to share its great joy with our neighbors and our world. That is the call to our church. That is the hope of Easter. That is why we worship this morning and every day, because we know that the pain, the fear, the sickness is not ultimate. Only God's love is ultimate. With this hope, be not afraid, and share Some Good News in the coming days and weeks and months filled with great joy.