

Sermon 032016 Easter  
Scripture: Matthew 28: 1-10  
Sermon Title- Easter: Life Begins

There is nothing subtle about Easter. There is nothing vague or ambiguous or vain or clever or cute about it at all. The resurrection is God's way of getting our attention. It is God's way of making us listen up, look up, and to live up.

To make that point in this morning's story from Matthew's Gospel, Easter Day does not begin with a slow, gradual triumph of light over darkness. God begins Easter with an earthquake. "There was a violent earthquake" says the gospel, "for an angel from heaven came down and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightening, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men." (Mt 28: 2-4)

God knows how to get our attention. God knows how to begin a new relationship. Easter is not about vague concepts or subtle distinctions, the stuff of seminars. Not a bit; Easter is confrontational; you are hit in the face by it.

Earthquakes are the least subtle of nature's offerings, which you know full well if you have ever been in one. It is likely the time where you feel least in control. I was in California back in the 1980's when a minor earthquake that the news people later described as a tremor hit. I could feel, in the immortal lyrics of Carol King, "The earth move under

my feet.” I was outside a restaurant. I was in California so I knew it could get really, really, bad. I didn’t, in the moment, know what to do... stay out in the street, or go inside. I had read that staying in a doorway was a good place, but at that moment I couldn’t remember if I’d read that doorways were a good idea or a bad idea. That’s the sort of confusion that the experience of fear brings.

To add to the fright of the biblical earthquake, when the two Mary’s arrive at the tomb, there is the angel sitting upon the stone. The angel’s first words were, “Do not be afraid.” This is good advice considering the circumstances. The words “do not be afraid” are often spoken in Scripture. In fact, the Risen Christ says the same thing to the women when he met up them a few verses later.

The earthquake, the angel, the empty tomb, then the Risen Christ... they likely were afraid. They might have thought it was the end of the world. In real sense, it was the end of the world, and the start of the new age. The message of Easter is this: Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. He told us this would happen and it is so. He is out there ahead of us and it is up to us to spread the good news. It has been accomplished. It is done. Christ is risen! The Lord is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

Life begins when God gets our attention. Sometimes our first reaction when God gets our attention is fear. Sometimes it is the experience of tragedy and terror that focuses us on God. God does not

send the tragedy and terror. But God is revealed to us in the tragedy and terror. When these experiences happen to us, we are more open to revelations of truth, we are made more acute, and we are placed on edge. I don't know where you were on the evening of September 11, 2001, but I was in a church and the church was full. The big, the dramatic, is sometimes what it takes to draw us to God. The resurrection is about as big and dramatic as it gets.

The women of the first Easter, and later the men, started in fear, but found new life in the resurrected Christ. They were empowered and transformed by the risen Christ to live their lives in newness of life. Life began for them when they stopped being afraid both of what they did know and being afraid of what they did not know. Life began for them when they could dare to believe that Christ is risen and made a difference in their lives. Life began when they believed it to be true even when they could neither explain it nor understand it.

“Do not be afraid.” These are the empowering words of Easter. Everyone is fearful of some public or private demon. At least one demon, for most of us more, eats away at our spirits. It is fear, not sin that is the great curse. Fear that I'll be recognized to be the fraud that I am- the great imposter complex. Fear that I will fail at some worthy endeavor or I will succeed at some unworthy endeavor. Fear that I lack the time to do what I must. Fear that I lack ability. Fear that I will hurt or be hurt. Fear that I will not know love. Fear that love will be painful

and hurtful. Fear that I am untrustworthy. Every one of us is hostage to fear. Add to that a whole raft of public fears: terrorism, economic downturn, violence in the streets, who might become the next president.

There is a fear of faith in many people. These folks have the notions that if they do not understand something, say... something like the resurrection, they cannot believe in it. These folks fear the ridicule of non-believers. Yet, these folks might worship their TV despite not having a bit of understanding of how a TV works. Their devotion to programs is fanatical without understanding a thing about how a TV works or how a program is produced. They also don't mind at all that it is not real. They blithely accept the mysteries of TV yet recoil from the mysteries of faith. They have no clue that there is infinitely more to be gained by a life of faith than a lifetime of watching TV. They fear faith because they don't understand what it is and they fear the power of faith.

Fear of death is a great burden of many. Some people have fear of death coming out of the fear of not having lived life fully. It is the fear of having lived this life and died without it really meaning anything. Life does not have to be remarkable in order to be meaningful. I believe this to be true. But the greatest curse is not fear of death, but the fear of life. It is those who dare not embrace the fullness of their opportunities for life who experience the greatest tragedy.

They don't live fully because they fear to fail, or they fear to succeed. They fail to move out from the circle of fear. Such defensive

living is not the stuff of which Easter faith is made. First the angel, then Jesus tells us not to be afraid in this short passage. Having gotten our attention, it is what God has to say to you and me.

That is our message, our good news, on this Easter morn. Do not be afraid of the earthquake, the tragedy, or the terror. Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed! Jesus has not simply conquered death, which he surely has. More importantly, Jesus has redeemed life so that you and I can live it here and now. The resurrection is not just about Jesus and a 2000-year-old story. It is about you and me, here and now, having our own life redeemed by the risen Christ.

Jesus affirms the good news that life is worth living now, here, in all its fullness, and all of its amplitude. You don't have to die to live.

Because Jesus lives we too may live, with as much time is given to us, free from the past, free from fear of the future. Christ leads the way. The angel in our lesson says, "He goes before you." Christ goes before us blazing a path for us to follow. Where Christ has gone, we need not fear. Christ went to the cross; we need not fear the cross. Christ went to the grave; we need not fear the grave. Christ has gone into the future; we need not fear the future. Christ inhabits life; we need not fear life. Christ is risen; we need not fear.

God has our attention. God has come into this world as a man named Jesus Christ that we may have life and that we may have it more abundantly. Because He lives, so, too, may we. So this Easter is really

about you. Your life begins anew, fresh, alive, true, and abundant. It is all here for you. Do not be afraid. AMEN