

Matthew 28: 1-10 “Don’t Be Afraid!” Rev. Janet Chapman 4/5/26

Little Tommy came running into the kitchen to ask if he could watch a wildlife special on the public television station. “Hurry, Mom! It’s got lions and tigers and snakes and all kinds of wild animals. Please, Mom, can I watch it?” “Well, sure, honey,” she answered. “You know it’s all right to watch that station.” (I would add until we don’t have it anymore). She said, “It sounds like a wonderful educational show for a brave little guy like you to watch.” “Will you come and watch it with me?” he asked. “I’m sorry but Mommy is kind of busy right now.” “But Mom, you’ve got to watch it with me – I’m too scared to watch it by myself.” This is how things are sometimes. There are a lot of exciting things in our world; there are many unique and adventurous opportunities that make life worth living. There is also a great deal of unknown as well, and we want someone to keep us company to help curb our fears.

This is the case with today’s story. Two women have headed out to Jesus’ tomb together to anoint his body, probably because it was just too scary to go alone. There is comfort in being in the company of others. As they stand at the tomb after a frightening earthquake rolled the stone away, an angel appears. The angel makes an announcement which sparks fear all around, even to the mighty soldiers stationed there to guard the tomb from body thieves. They literally faint ... so much for the mighty powers of the government. The angel makes a huge announcement and as I was reflecting on it, out of the blue, came a song from my childhood attending scout and church camp – a funny song about announcements which probably has more truth to it than we care to admit. It went

something like this...“Announcements, announcements, announcements... What a terrible way to die, What a terrible way to die, What a terrible death, to be talked to death. What a terrible way to die.” We campers always groaned when it was time for announcements so we would break out in this song which often sent the camp director into a tailspin. I’m aware at church that when we get to the announcements section at the end of worship, many folks have already turn their minds over to other things like what’s for lunch, will I make it home in time to watch the game, did I ever get gas for the lawnmower, where did I leave my work gloves? Nobody pays much attention to announcements about church life printed on the back of your bulletin, announced on slides during the opening powerpoint, written about in the monthly newsletter, and then read to you at the end of worship as if you can’t read them yourself. It’s even included in the benediction, “And may God help the people to remember the Good Friday worship service this week.” I know it’s hard to listen to announcements. One reason is we hear them over and over again. If we wanted to make someone deaf, we would do it by repetition. I don’t know why I thought of this today except that I have an important announcement to share with you, an announcement that may be expected by some, in fact some of you have already asked me about it, and I kept saying its not time yet, its not time yet. But all the signs have come together to clear the way for this major announcement in the life of the church and our lives together. The major announcement is that this morning, a little bit before daybreak, God raised from the dead Jesus of Nazareth.

This really is my whole assignment today, to make the announcement. Jesus warned his disciples that when you go out to sow the seed, which is the word of God, be ready for it. Some of the seed will fall on the path where the repeated passage of people, back and forth, back and forth, will harden the path like concrete. Some of the seed will fall on the path and the sparrows from the rooftop and the chickens from the barn will peck it away. Nobody receives it. Who can hear this announcement? Certainly not the “like-dead men” soldiers. The women in Matthew are told not to be afraid, but they still leave with fear and great joy. Suddenly Jesus meets them after they have shared the announcement with the other disciples, and again they are told, “Do not be afraid.” But fear seems to coincide with the message they share and some won’t believe it. In John, one of the disciples says, “I won’t believe it until I touch his side, not until I touch his hands, not until I touch his feet. I will not believe it.” So Dr. Fred Craddock encourages us to make the announcement a little less complicated. This is why I’m not going to trivialize it by just speaking of eggs, daffodils, and things. No, there is definitely a cross involved in this resurrection here. I’m not going to fill the air with good cheer and let Easter evaporate into a vague cloud of good feelings. I can’t do that. My job is simply to make the announcement. And the announcement is this: Sometime this morning, before first light, God raised Jesus of Nazareth from the dead. I can’t dumb it down by giving you a few minutes of explanation as to what resurrection means. I’m not going to shrink it up by trying to provide some scientific parallels

so that it will help your believing. No, but I will tell you that for a lot of people, this announcement is very, very important.

I can personally share with you that the importance of this announcement to me is not just the resurrection of the dead but the resurrection of none other than Jesus of Nazareth. Not King Herod who tried to have the baby killed while it was still in the cradle; not Pontius Pilate who, as the governor, screamed at Jesus saying, “Don’t you know I have the power to kill you in this minute? I can do it right now!” Not Tiberius Caesar who sat like a marble statue in Rome and said, “I have nothing really to do with peasants, especially Jewish ones. What was his name again? Jesus? Never heard of him.” Who was raised from the dead? Jesus of Nazareth. God lifted up this particular person and said, “This is the one I’ve vindicated. This is the one I affirm. This is the one I exonerate. This is the one that tells you this is what I had in mind when I created you in my own image. Look at him, totally without violence. You could walk among the people of his land and time and say, “Can anybody raise a hand if Jesus ever spoke lies about you? Laid hands against you? Betrayed you? Let you down by not working beside you to do God’s work? Can anyone? No, never.”

God was telling us, “This is what I have in mind for the world.” God raised Jesus from the dead so that not even death would have the final word. Awhile back, an unpublished writing of Carl Sandburg’s was discovered which said, “So take up your cross and walk the thorn way. And if a sponge of vinegar be handed to you on a spear, take that too. The soul is woven of endurance. God knows.” Mr. Sandburg wrote this after

hearing the announcement. You don't have to be in a hurry to make this announcement something important in your life. The celebration of Easter in the church lasts 50 days. We think of today as Easter Sunday, but this year the Easter season lasts until May 24, so you don't need to be in a big hurry. For some people, it can take longer than 50 days; God is good at giving extensions, but the longer we wait, the harder living becomes, the more death and fear keep their grasp firmly upon us. "Don't be afraid," the angel says, for some time this morning before sunrise, God raised from the dead in hearts and minds across the world, Jesus of Nazareth, and life became worth living again.