

**Matthew 28:1-10**

<sup>2</sup>After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. <sup>4</sup>For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. <sup>5</sup>But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. <sup>6</sup>He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. <sup>7</sup>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.' <sup>8</sup>So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. <sup>9</sup>Suddenly Jesus met them and said, 'Greetings!' And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. <sup>10</sup>Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.'

I read the resurrection story as it is recorded in Matthew. The message that the angel gave the women at the tomb is worth looking at. We would miss much if we didn't listen to this message from Matthew.

Matthew tells of the angel. This angel was accompanied by an earthquake. He rolled back the stone all by himself and then he sat on it. He looked like lightning. The guards there passed out.

The angel's first words were to the women who had come to see the grave, the place of death. These women were Mary Magdalene and another woman named Mary. The angel said, "Do not be afraid."

A good thing to say, but hard to do - given that this was a fearful thing to have had happen. Angels who look like lightening, and earthquakes, and big stones rolling around and all, it's easy to say "Don't be afraid."

The women probably were afraid. They had come to look at the tomb, the place of death. They knew what to expect; people at least know what to expect when they are going to look at death...It's predictable. It makes us sad, but it doesn't make us afraid.

But the tomb was *empty*. It was no longer a predictable place of death. The tomb had become an astounding, earthshaking proclamation of life.

God's message to these bewildered women on that Sunday morning was, "Do not be afraid."

It is the same message the angel has for the bewildered disciples this morning. We are faced with - life. God's first message to us must be, "Do not be afraid."

There is something revealing about human nature in the first words of the angel. "Do not be afraid." Here he comes directly from God. He rolls away the stone from the tomb of death and shows that death has been overcome. We are now living with the promise of life.

The first reaction is fear.

Life, real life, being lived everyday in the love of God is a challenge that leaves us fearful.

Easter is the defeat of death. The offer of living our lives as we were created to live them. Excited, accomplishing things we could never accomplish if God did not live, helping people more than being concerned for ourselves. – That is Easter.

All of that is placed in our hands, so the messenger's first words are "Do not be afraid."

It is noteworthy that, in Scripture, the opposite of love is not hate, but fear. God keeps saying, "Do not be afraid. Come closer. Live with me." The first man and woman, in the Garden of Eden, when they sinned and heard God coming, they did not hate God...they were afraid of him. Ever since the first sin, we have faced the same consequences. Sin and death result in fear.

God acts like God. He loves us; he forgives us; he gives us all good things. He defeats death. ... And as he does all these things his instructions for us are "Do not be afraid." He doesn't say, "Do not hate me." He says, "Do not be afraid."

People can be afraid of so many things. There are the inner fears. We look at ourselves and we are afraid that we are inadequate. We can't do what we want to be able to do. People who feel that way might quit trying. Or they might get pretty bossy - telling everyone everything with perfect assurance and little attention to reality. (Reality only aggravates the fear.)

Inner fears make us afraid of what we are like. Inner fears keep us from talking with others, telling other people how we feel. God says, "Don't be afraid of how you are. You are my child, my creation. Take my life into you."

People are also afraid of each other. Afraid of strangers, people who are different. We are afraid of people who are near by. We are afraid of people we have never seen before and probably never will. Hear the message of Easter. "Do not be afraid." Death is defeated.

People can be afraid of God. Even though people have a good healthy understanding of God...they still have the fear that one day God is going to get them. Even though we have learned a lot of good things about God, still there is the fear that when we get to heaven our resume had better look good.

The message of Easter is God is alive. He will live with us.

When we look into the empty tomb and know that God can live with us the first words we need to hear are, "Do not be afraid."

People who are afraid are always interested in power. People who are afraid of being hurt, physically, or having their things taken away, sometimes look for power by keeping weapons or something around that will threaten the people they are afraid of.

People who are afraid for their security look for power through money. Money gives the power to do things, have things...and a lot of people use it to fight their fears.

People who are afraid for their pride, look for power by keeping close to familiar people. People who can be counted on to approve of a certain kind of person. And the power of familiar approval fights the fear of dealing with new ideas and new understandings.

People who are afraid of God seek the power of being their own gods. They will decide what is right or wrong. They will decide what is prudent and wise and what is foolish and impractical. They don't want any input on the subject from God the Father.

They are afraid of a God who is alive and looking to move into their lives. Telling them what he wants them to do. They want the power to tell themselves what to do.

People who are afraid are always interested in power.

People who love are always ready to give up power. That is what Jesus did. That is the way of love.

The angel knows about love. He rolls away the stone and reveals that death is defeated. He points to the empty tomb and says, "Do not be afraid."

God is alive. Jesus does not live in our lives and give us direction out of fear. Sometimes people appeal to fear in Jesus' name, but that is not the message of Easter.

We should be very concerned when we hear people calling us to a life of fear in the name of the risen Lord.

Sermons are preached begging faithful people to be afraid, telling people to be afraid that they are not good enough, warning people to be afraid of an angry God who isn't likely to put up with them.

When we are called to be afraid, we are being called by the voice of Satan.

He calls us to be afraid that we won't have enough money to retire. To be afraid that we might have too much time on our hands and be bored. Satan calls us to be afraid of what other people think of us. Mostly he calls us to be afraid of what God is calling us to do. He doesn't want us doing the work of God.

It does not sound like the Good News from the angel who was at the empty tomb. He said, "Do not be afraid." The worthwhile things of our lives are not done because of fear. The angel says, "Love is stronger than fear. Death has been defeated. We live in new life."

This life does not keep us from any fear at all. Fear creeps in all the time. But it does cause fear to lose its power over us.

We are loved. We live in the life that has overcome death - the life of Jesus.

This morning an angel comes before you. He rolls away the stone in front of the tomb. He points inside and says, "This tomb is empty. Death is defeated. You have new life. You are living with God now. There are strangers who you need to get to know. There are people you need to tell about this new life. There are new things you need to learn. There are new ideas you need to trust. All those things you've been afraid of, all those things you've been telling yourself you can't do...You need to start doing them."

This empty tomb means new life. Do not be afraid.