

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

² There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴ The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

⁵ The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.”

⁸ So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.” (Matthew 28:1-10)

Sermon Theme: Do Not Be Afraid! He Is Risen!

A couple of them had already been here. They knew what they would find. They had seen his lifeless body being placed in the tomb. They watched as the heavy stone was rolled into place and the entrance was shut. They felt the finality of it all on Friday. But they weren't done. They loved their Lord. So, Mary Magdalene, the other Mary, and a few other women go to the tomb to show one last moment of love and respect. But it wasn't just spices for anointing the body that they were packing with them when they came to the tomb. They were carrying a lot of fear too.

That's something we can relate to this Easter. There are all sorts of different types of fears that we bring to the empty tomb. You can't ignore the easy one that's in your face whenever you go online or watch the news: COVID-19. The eerie feeling creeps on you while practicing social distancing in the stores. You see it on the signs of most of the businesses in town and the fewer cars on Main Street. There's the fear of the virus itself and how it could possibly affect those we love and care about. There's the fear of number of hospital beds and resources. And underneath it all is the fear of death.

But it's not just the virus. It's fear for how someone is handling the extra isolation, how they are dealing with being at home, fear of what's going to come next. Will the economy recover? What's this doing to my job? How long is this actually going to go on? How much longer can I deal with it all? Maybe you are like me and you enjoy being with your family; you would just like to see other faces too. When is life going to go back to "normal?" What is that normal going to look like? When can I get back to the things that I enjoy?

So how do we handle these fear? How can we put them to rest? The thing is, when you look at it more closely, those are not new fears. Only now they're wearing the mask of COVID-19. In order to answer those questions, we need to ask, "Why do I have these fears?" To help us answer that we peel back that covering of COVID-19, put it into a box, ignoring it for a little while so we can analyze the fears themselves. So we still have that fear of what it's going to happen with the economy, our jobs, our health, and our relationships with our families. That's nothing new. We are afraid of what "normal" is going to look like in the not-so-distant future. That too isn't anything different. So why do we have these fears? It's control. It's knowing, whether we want to admit it or not, how little control we really do have.

But it's not just about us not having control, it's that God is in control. It might sound strange to say; why would I have fear because God is in control? It's because we do not perfectly trust him. Ever since Adam and Eve ate from the fruit trying to take control for themselves that perfect trust has been lost. We still wrestle and fight against that sinful nature that lost the trusting relationship that God designed in us to have. So it fails to trust that God remains at work behind this virus. It doesn't trust whenever we feel ourselves losing control of a situation.

Part of that might be because if God is in control, then why does he allow it to happen? Many want to believe that it's divine judgment and punishment on one group, one specific sin, another action. But His Word does not reveal that to us. What his Word does reveal is his calling for us to repent. He wants us to stop listening to those lies we tell ourselves that I am in control. He pops the fragile balloon of sinful pride to teach me that trusting in myself is not trusting in him. It's sinning.

But we are slow learners. We still see humanity trying to grab some type of control to put these fears to rest. Mankind will look to money and stimulus checks. Some hope the government will make it more of their responsibility. Others look to a

vaccine to be made and cure to be found. In short, mankind—we—like to look to ourselves. And it works, for a while. That is until the next sickness comes, another unplanned for, unforeseen life situation comes up, life simply doesn't go the way you plan. Then questions about whether or not God is able to or does have your best interests in mind pop into your head. Fear starts bubbling under the surface and trust in God's control is shaken again.

The only answer to this fear rests in the hands of the Creator God who calls the world to repentance for not trusting him above all things while mercifully being patient with his fallen creation. He wants us to know and believe that his love is far greater and superior to all those things that want to make us afraid.

And so we meet the women at the tomb where the angel proclaims: **“Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay”**

(Matthew 28:5-6). Do not be afraid. Why? Because Jesus is risen, just as he said. It's as simple and straight-forward as that. Yes, Jesus was crucified on the cross. It's there where the payment for sin was paid with his blood. Punishment was given. Justice was served. He who was without sin became sin for us, claimed your sins to be his own, gave up his life and was buried in that tomb with your sins.

But where is he? Not here. You can look and see. The body isn't where the women saw it be put to rest. Had Christ not been raised and his body was still lying in that tomb, we would have much more to fear than a virus or whatever struggles we would face in the years we breathe in this world. It would mean Jesus' death meant nothing. It was just another human person who was defeated by death. It would mean sin would still be mine. Punishment is what I would be looking forward to. We would have no hope in the face of any of our fears. But Christ is risen; he's risen indeed! That means his death does mean something. It's proof that when Jesus says, “It is finished,” on the cross. It really is. God's wrath is appeased. Your broken relationship with him is fixed and restored. What was lost is now yours. The payment for sin was made. Your receipt for payment approved is that empty tomb.

But your God is not done. He wants Jesus' work to be yours. So he gives it to you. At your baptism he promises your sins will not be counted against you in the future. With God's Word spoken and water poured on your head you were buried with Christ in that tomb so that when he is raised to life again you were raised with him (Romans 6). You were made a new creation that rests at peace in God's

controlling hands. Do not be afraid all is well between you and God because Christ is risen, he is risen indeed.

The end is already guaranteed for you at the tomb. You already died with Jesus and have been raised to live with him so that death is sleep for God's people. But until that time comes, we still live on this earth. As the angel sends the women to share the Good News, so you are sent today. And like those women at that first Easter, we too leave with a mixture of fear and joy. But as Jesus did for them he does for you today at this Easter. He says to you, "Greetings! It's good to see you. I know that you still have fears. As long as you are on this earth you are going to wrestle with them. But do not be afraid. I have risen from the dead. Fear cannot control you. Even your sin is no longer yours. My perfect life and death has set you free. Have no doubt, I declared it on the cross and give it to you through faith that the Spirit creates in your heart. I know you are going to struggle and at times you will feel like you are drowning in it. But I'm not leaving you alone. No, I'm with you in the Lord's Supper where you touch my body and blood with the bread and wine. I come to forgive and strengthen you. You still hear my voice speaking to you through my Word. Do not be afraid."

We have a unique opportunity to do for others what Jesus does for us. Now is the time for us to share the good news that Christ is risen! Do not be afraid. You need to hear it. They need to hear it. Point people to the empty tomb. Assure them because Jesus is risen we have nothing to fear. We can face whatever comes our way not because of our own strength and capability but because we have the all-powerful God on our side. He still is our Risen Savior who defeated our greatest enemies of sin, death, and the devil. He still is our Risen Lord who controls all things—even those things you fear—for the good of his people. He still wants all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. The tomb is still empty. Do not be afraid, brothers and sisters. Christ is risen. He's risen indeed. Amen.