

Matthew 28:1-15

April 4, 2021

In 1932, Franklin Delano Roosevelt in his first of four inaugural addresses famously said,

“So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief *that the only thing we have to fear is...fear itself* — nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.”

FDR gave this speech as the nation was trapped in the throes of what history has called the Great Depression. His point was that the only thing keeping the American people back from full recovery was and climbing out of the economic swamp was nothing of substance just irrational fear.

His message? Don't be afraid.

But what reason did he give to the people NOT to be afraid.

No reason, really.

I don't know about you, but for me to really NOT be afraid of something I need a good reason. I need to hear WHY I don't need to be afraid. Otherwise it is just happy thoughts. Happy thoughts and mere optimism does nothing to put fear to flight.

Today we talk about something that does.

Today, we are going to see why the resurrection of Jesus gives us greater reason NOT to be afraid.

Jesus, by defeating death obliterates all reason to fear.

“Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ² And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴ And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. ⁵ But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.” ⁸ So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ And behold, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”

PRAY

Jesus, by defeating death obliterates all reason to fear.

1. *Jesus ALWAYS does what he says (Matthew 28:1-7)*

Early Sunday morning both Mary Magdalene and the other Mary who was the mother of Joseph went to the tomb. They exhibited colossal courage to return to the tomb. They knew which tomb it was because they watched—alone without any of the disciples—Joseph of Arimathea lay Jesus into the tomb.

After that, the tomb was sealed with wax and a guard was set to watch over what they thought was Jesus' final resting place. These two brave, sweet Mary's brought spices in the hopes of tending to Jesus' body that was hastily laid in the tomb Friday before sunset.

As they arrived, they saw a scene they did not expect. That two ton stone was rolled away and there was an angel using that stone for a chair. Matthew describes him to us in verse 3,

³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.
⁴ And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men.

That is some thick irony.

Jesus who is supposed to be dead—is gone. The guards who are supposed to be very much alive and...guarding resemble dead men. Not only did they see a scene that they did not expect, they heard a message from the angel that was equally unexpected,

Vs 5,

⁵ But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid,

In the original it literally says, “You both do not be afraid...” contrasting the Mary’s with the stupefied soldiers. In essence the angel is saying, they have good reason to be afraid—I’m scary and have bad intentions toward them.

You? No. You don’t have to be afraid.

Why?

for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.”

Why do they not need to be afraid?

Notice the angel did not JUST say, because Jesus is risen. He said,

⁶ He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.”

In other words. Jesus who died is now alive, and he told you he was going to do this. This Jesus does EXACTLY what he says. Jesus himself references his resurrection four times. An example is from Matthew 16:21,

“From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests

and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” Matthew 16:21

Though he talked about it, none of his followers understood what it meant for him to rise from the dead. Probably because they had never heard of anyone rising from the dead to never die again.

And he really did physically rise from the dead. The angel didn't say, “Fear not, whenever you think of Jesus, he is there with you.” OR “When you get a feeling deep inside, that is Jesus.” OR “You have memories of him—hold onto those and he is with you.”

No.

The angel says—he has risen.

And then he says, don't take my word for it. Come into the tomb and see the place where they laid his body. See if he is there. The angel says come and see. So, the stone was rolled away not to let Jesus out but to let the witnesses in.

The Mary's did not see the Savior. He had risen.

He did what he said he would do.

Jesus was true to his word.

Do you see how this message helped the Mary's not fear?

How about us?

How does the message that he does what he says help us?

Do you think that we have reason to heed the words of the angels to the Marys?

“Do not be afraid...”

They had reason to be afraid because Jesus did what he said. Now, do you see how this helps US not be afraid?

We can take Jesus at his word too.

Here is the logic—Greater to lesser.

If Jesus could say that he would do something as GREAT as rising from the dead, something no one else had ever done. If he could predict NOT that he would somehow evade death but be consumed by death and come back thereby killing death.

If he can do that—do you think we can take Jesus at his word?

The darkness of death steamrolled him, having the last word. Death was always able to still every tongue and quiet every mouth. Each time. But there was this one time. And at that time, Jesus came back and said, “Don’t be afraid.”

You can take Jesus at his word.

Death has ALWAYS claimed its victims indiscriminately—the young, the old; men, women; good, evil; the noteworthy, the anonymous; the great, the small; the mighty the weak. Each time. But there was this one time. And that time, Jesus claimed death as a victim.

You can take Jesus at his word.

The monster of death is mankind's oldest and fiercest enemy. No one could evade its clutches, no one could hide from its stare. Everyone would be killed by death. Each time. But there was this one time. And that time, Jesus killed death.

You can take Jesus at his word.

If he says something, he can and will do it.

So, why do you have reason not to fear this morning? Because if Jesus delivers in something as singular as the resurrection you can take Jesus at his word.

Let's personalize this—

Do you see why we don't have to be afraid anymore? Our savior speaks promise upon promise to us from his word. We can believe each one. We can take him at his word.

Let's take a promise that is near and dear to many of us—if it isn't it should be.

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28

Imagine if we read that—and Jesus is still dead.

Could we believe it?

No.

Because there was no one who ever loved God like Jesus. He was ferociously loyal to God and his purposes. He was doggedly committed to doing his father's will over and against what he wanted. He was devoted to the father.

And, still, he died.

Now, if he stayed dead would this promise in Romans hold any water?

No.

We could rightly say—what about Jesus. He loved God and he was put to shame and died. But he is not dead. That means you can take him at his word.

But he lives and so—this is a resurrection promise for us to grasp like a sword to fight fear.

This is a promise you can hold onto and a fiery sword in your hand as you do battle with fear of any kind. Think of what you are most afraid of—

- What if my husband dies?
- What if my children don't come to the Lord?
- What if I do not get a job?
- What if I am always alone?
- What if my future always seems so murky?
- Whatever you are afraid of...

Our passage would direct our eyes to an open tomb and the voice of an angel saying, **“Do not be afraid...”**

Do you see?

Jesus is alive—now we can be sure that all things will work together for our good.

Do you see?

Now, the promise is NOT that we will always understand how all things work together for our good. Neither are we promised that they will work together for our good in this life. In fact, with the really hard things in life we won't be able to understand.

Just as the disciples surely wondered aloud—what good can come of this?

Only later did they see.

We may not see.

Do you see what the Lord has shown us? NOT how all things will work out for good, but he has shown us the empty tomb. He has hollowed out the tomb so that we might filled with strength and not fear.

Do you see?

But because Jesus is alive, we can know he does what he says.

We can take him at his word.

Jesus, by defeating death obliterates all reason to fear.

What is the first way that our passage shows us that when Jesus defeated death he obliterated all reason to fear?

He ALWAYS DOES WHAT HE SAYS.

The first reason we don't have to be afraid is that Jesus ALWAYS does what he says. The second reason that we can be confident that

Jesus, by defeating death obliterates all reason to fear.

2. No Matter What, You Are Family (Matthew 28:8-10)

The brave duo of Mary's walked up to the tomb, but ran off from it with news to tell the disciples. They meet an old friend on the way.

Look at verse 9,

⁹ And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him.

"Greetings" does not really do this word justice. It sounds too formal. As the Mary's run upon him, he says the equivalent of—"Hey." Or "What's up?"

They respond in the only appropriate way—they fall on their face and worship him. Jesus is God. In fact, this a different sermon for a different day but in another part of the NT, we find that Jesus Christ is the revelation of God to us.

Jesus is God.

Anyway, Jesus has a something similar to say to the ladies as his messenger.

Vs. 10,

¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."

It is remarkable that Jesus would refer to his disciples with such a term of endearment. He calls them—what? “My brothers.” If there were any crowd of people to disown it would be the disciples.

When we last saw the disciples, were they acting like Jesus’ family?
Were they sticking by him?

Were they saying to the Romans—“Hey he is with us, you are going to arrest me too!”

Were they at his trial testifying on behalf of Jesus?

No.

They were not acting like his brothers but like cowards.

Remember?

After the Last Supper when Jesus was in the Garden he took his three best friends, Peter, James and John with him to pray.

What do they do?

Fall asleep.

Jesus is weeping.

Jesus is wailing.

Jesus is sweating blood.

The disciples are catching zzzzz’s.

And then Jesus rouses them and as they wipe the sleep out of their eyes it was just in time to see a cohort of Roman soldiers coming to arrest him under the cover of darkness. Do you remember what the disciples did?

“Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. [56] But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.” Then all the disciples left him and fled.” Matthew 26:55–56

They ran off—leaving Jesus alone.

And it got worse. When Jesus was on trial, Peter mustered up the nerve to go to the courtyard of the home the illegal nighttime trial was being held.

“Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came up to him and said, “You also were with Jesus the Galilean.” [70] But he denied it before them all, saying, “I do not know what you mean.” [71] And when he went out to the entrance, another servant girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.” [72] And again he denied it with an oath: “I do not know the man.” [73] After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, “Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you.” [74] Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, “I do not know the man.” Matthew 26:69–74

Peter curses himself to prove that he does not know Jesus.

And Jesus calls the disciples and Peter, brothers.

Remarkable.

Do you see what this means?

Why does he call them his brothers?

Because they acted like his brother? No.

Because they stood by him like family? No.

Because they protected him like family? No.

Why?

Because if you are a follower of Jesus you are family. Always. No matter what. Do not misunderstand me, I'm not saying you can live however you want:

- Live with your boyfriend/girlfriend
- Drink to excess regularly
- Lie, cheat steal to get ahead
- Perpetually bitter, angry and vindictive

And just say—well, I can do whatever I want. I believe.

No. Genuine disciples (followers) of Jesus will always want to please the Lord. Now, here is the thing—we will never do it perfectly.

Like the disciples, we will fail him.

We will say—I love Jesus there is no one like him.

And then we doze off and dull our senses with leisure or politics.

Other times we will say—I will go with you Jesus to the end!

And then when we see angry faces at work from people who heard you are a Christian, we run off. And try to be more “normal.”

There may even be times that we outright reject Jesus with our mouths—much more likely with our manner of life—and deny that we know him.

As followers we are like the disciples.

What would Jesus say to do you?

Call you brother or sister.

Remarkable.

Jesus loved his disciples without fail though they failed him.

He could have said to the Mary's—"Listen, I have a message for those cowards. I'm coming. And Peter, he better watch out most of all. I'm coming for him."

But he doesn't he says,

"Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee..."

Do you see the other reason why we don't need to be afraid this morning? Any who come and follow him—put their trust in him—he loves without reproach. Can you imagine how Peter heard this message?

Before he could ask for forgiveness—Jesus is calling him a brother.

Do you see his commitment?

Do you see his heart?

Do you see that the bonds of Christ's love are FAR stronger than Peter's failure?

Do you see?

We all need to see.

I fail Jesus.

You fail Jesus.

We all fail Jesus.

But Jesus WILL NOT fail us.

How do I know? He lives!

How are we to think of our failures in the shadow of the empty tomb?

Ortlund says it just right,

“If you are part of Christ’s own body, your sins evoke his deepest heart, his compassion and pity. He “takes part with you”—that is, he’s on your side. He sides with you against your sin, not against you because of your sin. He hates sin. But he loves you.” Dane Ortlund

Jesus is always on your side.

Now, if Jesus had not rose from the dead. If his body remained unceremonially laid in the tomb, if he was dead, Peter would have lost a family member. And he would have great reason to fear—he would be alone in the world.

If Jesus were dead—what would his love be worth?

What would his commitment be worth?

What would he be worth?

It would be good, but like everyone the grave would swallow up all—

- Good intentions

- Sentiments of love
- All commitments

Do you see that if Jesus still occupied the grave his commitment to the disciples would be happy thoughts but in the end, nothing.

But our Jesus lives and he has killed death.

Christian, he has bound himself to you—that same power that brought him back from the grip of death—that power he uses to hold onto you.

Now, let me ask.

If Jesus holds you like that—what do you have to be afraid of?

What we need to do today is hear the voice of Jesus and look toward the empty tomb and hear the voice of Jesus

“Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers (and sisters) to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”

None of us are needing to go to Galilee. But we will see him just the same.

What do you have to be afraid of?

The tomb empty and Jesus is speaking to all of us—what is he saying?

“Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers (and sisters) to (come home one day), and there they will see me.”

Do you see?

Jesus, by defeating death obliterates all reason to fear.

Why? He is alive.

He will ALWAYS do what he says.

No matter what, you are family.

You don't have to be afraid.

Our temptation this morning is to look at ourselves instead of the empty tomb—we can wonder.

- What if I don't love Jesus enough?
- What if I don't stay committed enough?
- What I don't have faith enough?
- What if I am not strong enough?
- What if I am just too tired?
- What if I just am not enough?

“Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers (and sisters) to (come home one day), and there they will see me.”

Look away from yourself and look to Jesus.

- You will not love Jesus enough—but he loves you enough.
- You will not stay committed to Jesus enough—but he will stay committed to you enough.
- You will not have enough faith in Jesus—but Jesus has enough grace for you.
- You will not be strong enough to hold Jesus—but Jesus is strong enough for the both of you.
- You will get tired and weary—but Jesus he does not grow faint and is forever mighty.

You will not be enough—but Jesus—friends—he always is.

Jesus is alive.

We don't have to be afraid—we don't have anything to fear not even fear itself.

PRAY

[17] When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, [18] and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore...

Revelation 1:17–18

