

Do Not Be Afraid!—Resurrection of Our Lord Sunday

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[Acts 10:34-43](#)

[Colossians 3:1-4](#)

[Matthew 28:1-10](#)

As many of you might already know, here at Christ the Good Shepherd, we do our Sunday morning learning in a unique way. All those who want to learn more about the Bible, learn more about God and each other, of all ages, gather together. And this year's theme has been "Do not be afraid."

In our Bible, Old Testament and New, this phrase is both spoken to and by just about everybody, from God to God's messengers, to God's so-called important people. But especially it is spoken by those seemingly insignificant people, the ones that world ignores, but to whom God gives this sacred message. Did you know this phrase, or ones resembling it, from the beginning in Genesis to Revelation at the end is used in the Bible nearly 120 times?

Ask all the class participants and they will give you the full story: All these do-not-be-afraids are *related*. They begin with Abraham, whose name means "the-blessed-ancestor-of-many." God promises to Abraham—who is a wandering nobody—that not only will he be the blessed-ancestor, but that he will have a place to call home, he will be a blessing to all peoples and God will always be his God. Abraham trusts this word of God... but he and his family, they need lots of encouragement.

And in the long saga that takes us from Genesis to the Exodus from Egypt to wandering in the Wilderness to their home in the land, to their mistakes and losing the land, to returning again, to the expansion of God's promises to Abraham to all peoples, all nations, through Jesus— all along the way, God, and God's people, are there to say: "Do not be afraid."

We have heard 2 do-not-be-afraids today in our Matthean resurrection story. From the angel as he sits on the rock of the tomb like a cat. From the Risen Christ to his most faithful disciples, the women Mary and Mary.

And so, as we gathered in our Cross-Generation class, as we call it, we cataloged all the things we, as human beings, could be afraid of. It was scary! War, death, losses of all kinds, grief, political instability, shame, poverty, bodily pain—or witnessing our loved ones in pain.

And in our class, we often wondered, usually while laughing a wry kind of laughter: in the face of such horrendous fears what could simply saying: "Do not be afraid" do!?

Not much on its own. But as I said, in Scripture, all those 120 do-not-be-afraids are links in a chain. They are threads in a tapestry. Each do-not-be-afraid is a reminder of all the earlier ones in the story. Abraham and Sarah were afraid but the promise was fulfilled. The people of God were afraid, at so many turns, but they were delivered in ways they never could have expected.

God becoming flesh in Jesus; and as Peter preaches it to the Gentiles, to all people, in Acts, Christ unseating the devil and being raised on the Third Day, is more of the same story. But I know our fears persist. There is lots to be scared of in our world.

I think what is so bitterly ironic is that, at least in *our* culture, people are often really afraid of the opposite things. Parents of trans kids across our nation are scared. And this is because other people seem to be really scared of kids that are trans. Parents are scared that their beloved children won't be able to receive the literally, life-saving interventions they need. While others are terrified that these interventions will destroy our nation's values. People, on all sides, are so scared about who *might* or *might not* be the president in 2024. All people, of all political views, are scared! If it wasn't so sad, it would actually be kind of funny...

I'm sure Mary and Mary were scared too. They got up before dawn to go and see the tomb, the evidence of all their fears come true, because Jesus was dead. These women remind of when you've got a cut in your mouth, and it hurts like heck, but you just can't help but touch it with your tongue... to see if it still hurts. And then... yep, still hurts.

There they are, Mary and Mary go to see the tomb. How often do we, stubbornly, go to our tombs? Maybe, deep down, we want to be afraid? Fear after all is a really good thing evolutionarily, right? Fear keeps us from getting hurt. We instill fear of bad things in our kids—don't play too close to the edge, don't take candy from strangers!

Fear controls people, that's for sure. If you can make people afraid, you can make them do whatever you want. Fearful people don't speak up for what is right, but they easily become angry, and then violent, they hoard toilet paper and hand sanitizer, they accept torture, and murder, and lies, just to escape their fears.

So, Mary and Mary go to look at Jesus' tomb, to remind themselves of what they had lost. If you remember the Passion according to Matthew that we heard last Sunday: The Romans not only put a rock over Jesus' body, but they sealed the tomb. And the Romans let the Judeans put a guard of soldiers there as well. And Mary and Mary get there, and then something amazing happens. Something that scares the bejeebers out of the soldiers at least! "...there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone

and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men.”

This angel takes away the stone! This messenger not only takes away the stone, but sits on it! Take that, fears. And did you ever notice here: the angel doesn't take the stone away so Jesus can escape. But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said.”

The stone is rolled away for the benefit of the women, and not Jesus! I know you are looking to confirm your fears, says the messenger, but they are unfounded. Let them go. You know what the promise has been. Not only the promise of what Peter said: “the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all.” But also, the promise of Colossians: “...you have been raised with Christ... ...for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God...”

What would happen if when you were to look into the tomb of your own heart and when you looked there was no fear there? What would be there instead?

The Marys, Matthew says, still had some fear. I don't blame them with empty tombs, glowing messengers, earthquakes, and all. But Matthew also said they were filled with something else then too; “great joy.” What if, like the Marys, we are invited to look squarely at our fears, and to realize that they are empty.

And if they are not there, then certainly there is room for something else, something that God has been building inside us all along, from Abraham, our blessed ancestor, all the way here to us, today. I know it sounds crazy, but what if it is joy? What if it's just regular, ordinary, great joy. A joy which defiantly says, along with our Psalmist: “This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

Amen. Alleluia.