

SERMON – *Do not be afraid! He is Risen!*
Sunday, April 12, 2020 – GPR/Living Grace Lutheran Church

The holy gospel is according to St. Matthew, the 28th chapter....

Glory to you, O Lord.

Matthew 28:1-10 - The Resurrection of Jesus

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

Gospel Proclamation:

The gospel of our Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

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SERMON:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the baptized, faithful, crucified and resurrected Lord Jesus Christ who says, Do not be afraid!

It might be hard for you to imagine that we are celebrating Easter today... and this way. We are not all gathered together at a church wearing our best Easter outfit, we are not smelling the Easter lilies, we've been advised not to gather with our extended families, unless they are living with us – it's hard to imagine singing refrains of Alleluias when we might feel it is still Lent. And yet...the events of that first Easter – when Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb...and found it empty led to a knowing that a major event happened that changed the course of history...and it changed our lives...today, we know the pandemic has also changed our lives. But Jesus' words shortly after he rose from the dead bring comfort and joy to us this day.

That first day of a new week, the women go to the tomb – they are probably already uncertain of life – their friend and teacher was just killed and all they want to do is go and pay respects to him. And then an earthquake hits...and if that's not enough trauma after all they had been through – they are greeted by an angel of the Lord who says *Do Not Be Afraid...*

Jesus was dead...but he is not in the tomb, the rock has been rolled away and he has been raised!

The women leave the tomb to go tell the disciples – but who do they run into? Jesus...who greets them and says *Do Not Be afraid! Go and share the good news!*

Do Not Be afraid! They certainly had a lot to be afraid of...for their teacher and friend died, an earthquake has struck the region and now their world was turned upside down and Jesus was not in the tomb. I too would find myself afraid.

But this is not the first time that phrase *Do Not Be Afraid!* Appears in scripture. As some of you know, I like to look in scripture to see where else words or phrases appear. In the NRSV Bible, the phrase "*Do Not Be Afraid*" appears 78 times.

The first time we hear this phrase is when God is talking about his covenant with Abram: And the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." (Genesis 15)

And in Isaiah, chapter 41 (41:10) "do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand."

When the angel told Mary she would give birth to a son, and he would be called Jesus. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God." (Luke 1:29-31)

And an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 1:20)

And when an angel of the Lord appeared before the shepherds to tell them Jesus was born, the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. (Luke 2:9-11)

And when Jesus calls his disciples, he finds them fishing...and says to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." ¹¹When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him. (Luke 5:9-11)

Time and again, Jesus reassured his disciples saying, *Do not be afraid....*
In the Gospel of John he foretells his own death and resurrection...and assures his disciples with these words: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. ² In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. (John 14:1-3, 27)

From the first time God assures Abraham...to Jesus' reassurance to his disciples...and now the angel - and Jesus reassure the women with these words: **Do Not Be Afraid** as they leave the empty tomb.

Jesus never minimizes their fear. He acknowledges it...We have plenty of reason to be afraid. Change and revelation tempt us to be anxious because we have encountered something so beyond our understanding. When Jesus say *Do Not be afraid* – It is not

assurance that everything turns out for the best, because, if we are honest about it, it seldom does.

Rather it is assurance that whatever today may hold, God has the power to strengthen and uphold us; that what we must face – we do not face it alone, that nothing we encounter is stronger than God’s love, and that ultimately, God gets the last word! In the end – and sometime before the end – God’s love is triumphant!

I remember as a young girl growing up, that there would be times of fear – getting lost in Kmart, or one summer evening seeing a tornado on the horizon...and my mom and dad would assure me that they were right there for me. Do Not fear. They were probably afraid, but they always remained calm for our sake.

As adults, our fears become larger, and more complex – especially in our reality this day. We are not sure what tomorrow will bring – except more physical distancing from one another...do you find this is the time, you long to hug someone? And yet, we need to protect one another from a scary virus. We may even live in the fear of death – wondering if a loved one or ourselves will survive if we get the virus.

This last week, I learned a friend and her husband had been diagnosed with COVID-19. It became too close for comfort...fear and anxiety – I immediately went to my calendar and looked for when was the last time I saw her. I was fine it was months ago...but there was that moment of fear. It’s a transformational moment. It’s hard to say ...or maybe even hear the words: DO NOT FEAR.

We are living in a Good Friday world...filled with horrible statistics, death and fear. But I find the greatest comfort comes from knowing a God who loves each of us so much that while we may live in a Good Friday world, we are Easter people – we know that Jesus rose from the dead...

Easter turns the world upside down. The good news is heralded by an earthquake and terrifying angels, the women are the first to hear the good news, rather than the Twelve Disciples. (Matt. 28:1-10). Easter offers us transformation in every moment.

We are in a transformational time...We are in a season of dying and rebirth...for our communities, our world, our families. There are traditions and things we “normally would do” that are gone...but there is also new life that is emerging and thriving.

Almost simultaneously, as we embody Christ’s resurrection in the present, we celebrate it with great joy (Matt. 28:8).

With the words of assurance – Be Not Afraid - we can celebrate Easter today, similar to how that first Easter was with no big crowds, no Easter lilies...only a very great transformational moment where they learn that death did not have the last word! As Easter people, we can confidently hear and know that we do not need to be afraid because Jesus is with us. And when we hear and follow his words: Do not be afraid, go and tell my story! ...we are left with great joy that we know a Savior that says *I love you and you are mine. Amen.*

And now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Jesus Christ. Amen. (Philippians 4:7).