

Easter Sunday, April 12, 2020

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Do Not Be Afraid

Matthew 28:1-10

INTRODUCTION:

After Jesus was arrested and then executed by the Empire, the followers of Jesus also practiced social distancing. In the midst of deep sorrow, grief and fear, most of them hid out from the authorities together. Yet, as soon as they were able, Mary Magdalene and Jesus mother risked their own safety to see the tomb where they put him. They were compelled to choose courage over comfort.

this is when angels appeared to these faithful women, bringing them news more awe-inspiring than they could imagine - Christ is Risen!

Surely God’s angels can interrupt our lives today

breaking into our losses and sorrows to bring us a message of tremendous joy to change our lives and offer us hope of a future beyond the exile of COVID-19. Hear these words from the Gospel of Matthew 28, and take heart, for Christ has risen, he has risen indeed!

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**SCRIPTURE: Matthew 28: 1-10**

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. 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. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. 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. Come, see the place where he lay. 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.” So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

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Good and Loving God, it sometimes feels as if the dark night will swallow us up. This morning we invite You to be our light. Brighten the pathways of peace. Guide us along the road of healing, hope and service. Come Holy Spirit, Come. And, may my words and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing and acceptable to you our Rock and our Redeemer. AMEN

The pandemic has forced the entire world into a tomb-like experience. We have been suddenly ripped away from normal life and sequestered away in our homes. Plans have been canceled, celebrations postponed and opportunities lost. We can see brokenness everywhere we look. We see cavernous flaws in our institutions, our social order, our treatment of the most vulnerable among us. We have economic instability and a questionable food supply. The brokenness can feel frightening and even hopeless. And yet, this peculiar time also connects us to the truth of our Gospel story like never before.

On this very first Easter there were no crowded churches, trumpet fanfares or family gatherings. On the very first Easter, the disciples were sequestered away too, hiding from what might kill them. And it was in their grief and despair, when they thought all was lost, when God showed up, resurrected from death to new life, proclaiming hope and showing us that this long night will end. The dawn of a new day is on the horizon.

The resurrection story is what ultimately unites us today over time and distance. There are many lessons we are learning even as we move through this cloud of unknowing. We are learning that our community is more than a physical gathering together in a single place. We are learning that community is a spiritual connection and church is the fullness of that connection beyond proximity. In many cases, I'm hearing stories of how relationships are actually strengthened, families are bonding closer than ever before and we are all learning how to live in the present. The sudden ceasing of schedules, appointments and deadlines almost force us to notice spring emerging day by day.

Even in this tomb like experience, we are seeing what our resurrection might look like. As we transition into our new life, will we continue to find the courage to care for others over personal comfort? Will love actually win? Jesus led the way for all who choose to follow. Now is the time for us to truly live as followers in the way of Jesus. And the Way of Jesus is always the continual cycle of life, death and always resurrection into new life.

Edward Friedman wrote that, faith is not "the affirmation of some abstract belief, but the courage to live in a world with no guarantees." It is living into a tenacious hope

that "Beyond the mystery, meaning. Beyond the brokenness, wholeness. Beyond the despair, hope. Beyond the fear, purpose."

After a while it will be safe again to come out, to be together and rejoice in our rescue. And I believe that then we will truly know how God always brings new life out of death and LOVE always wins.

So fear not, people of God! Where ever you may be, dance! Our God is faithful and resurrection happens every day!