

Matthew 28:1-10

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Easter Sunday – Do Not Be Afraid!

4/24/2011

Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed! Hallelujah!

So it's true – Grace, mercy and peace are yours from God our Father, through our Lord and Savior, the risen and victorious Jesus Christ.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, our risen Lord!

Do not be afraid!

Franklin Delano Roosevelt said that “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” Yeah right. Try telling that to the man being mauled by a bear, or the woman about to be hit by a car, or anyone facing a life threatening danger. Just telling them they don't have to fear it doesn't quite do the job.

A couple years ago, my daughter was walking home from the school bus when a neighbor's dog that was at least her size came roaring out after her. It charged her, knocked her down and was on top of her barking and snarling. What good do you think it would have done at that time if her brother nicely said to her, “There's nothing to fear, sis.” I'm guessing she wouldn't really have bought that. In fact, she still doesn't buy it when she sees a dog she doesn't know, not until that dog is safely out of sight.

You see, the only chance you really have to remove fear is to remove whatever it is that is causing the fear. Thankfully for Abi, her mom came down the street to help get that dog away from her. But just telling someone not to be afraid doesn't accomplish anything. Think about that. The person afraid of what their cancer will do still has cancer. The person afraid of losing their job still may still be in jeopardy. The person afraid of loneliness could still be all alone. Saying “Don't be afraid,” does nothing by itself. You've got to remove the reason for fear first – otherwise fear can be paralyzing, literally.

We see that in our text. Look at verse 4: “**The guards were so afraid of him (that angel) that they shook and became like dead men.**” An earthquake is scary enough – but to see an angel?!? Remember what angels can do. We're not talking about chubby faced babies with wings. Remember, it was an angel that took out 70,000 Israelites as a result of David's foolish census; it was an angel that killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night. Imagine seeing something powerful enough to do that in front of you. It makes sense that the soldiers dropped unconscious.

But notice something. The women didn't. Both groups felt the earthquake and saw the angel – but one group became like dead men. The other didn't. Why? What was the difference? The only difference was that the women had the Word. The only difference we see in the text is that the angel spoke to the women: “**Do not be afraid.**” The soldiers didn't even stay conscious long enough to hear that. You see, the appearance of the angel could only make sense to those that knew why the angel was saying those words. This is exactly what Jesus had promised. Those women had become accustomed to seeing God work in their lives so they were ready to be reminded not to be afraid.

So now – which group are you? Are you the strong, mighty, self-sufficient soldiers? Or the weeping women? Now, don't get me wrong. The soldiers had been around. I'm sure they knew there was something about this Jesus guy. They wouldn't have posted a guard if they really believed he was who *they* said he was – a fraud. They posted a guard because they knew what he had said. They posted a guard because they were afraid it might be true, that they were wrong. You see they had lined up with his enemies. If they were wrong, they were in trouble. And seeing the angel proved that they were, that they had reason to fear. But for the women – they heard the message differently, they saw the angel differently. They experienced that day through their relationship with Jesus.

How about you? Because you do have earthquakes, and some of them have more power to shake your life than even that 9.0 on the Richter scale that rocked Japan. You feel earthquakes. The question is how you handle them. Everyone has things that make their lives shake and their world quake, no matter who you are or whose you are – whether it is the kid losing the big game, the teen getting dumped, the loss of a job, or a house, or health. Think of the fear inspired by those big words, the C-word: Cancer ...The D-words: Divorce ...Death. The difference between the soldiers and those women was not what

they had been through. It was how they handled it. It was how they heard those words: “Do not be afraid.”

So which are you? When the junk of life happens, and it does – does it do any good to say to you “Do not be afraid.”? Please, don’t let these be just some empty words. Hear the Word that has actually taken away the reason for fear. And the more a part of your life that Word is, the more you’re able to handle things – because you are accustomed to seeing God work. Have you seen that play out? Two people lose the same loved one and one is a wreck while the other seems to be a mountain of strength? Why? Because one hears the Word.

It’s because of what the Word says. No matter what your problem – here is the solution. Verse 5: **“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.”**

This right here is why virtually every time you see an angel appear in Scripture, his first words are “Do not be afraid.” If not for the death and resurrection of Jesus – every encounter with God or his representatives ought to paralyze us with fear. Really, it ought to kill us, because we’ve lined ourselves up on the wrong side of God. That is what sin does. If you are not perfect, no matter how close you are, if you are not perfect, if you’ve ever done anything wrong, which you have – you have made yourself the enemy of this Holy One who must condemn sin.

But yet, the angel said, “Do not be afraid,” and it worked. Those ladies didn’t fall over dead. Because they were looking for Jesus, who was crucified. Perfect, holy, sinless Jesus was crucified. And that, my friends is what removes the reason for our fear. He paid the price for our sins. He paid the penalty for our treason. He was crucified. And the fact that he wasn’t in that tomb... The fact that what the angel said was true – **“He has risen, just as he said”**... meant that he was who he said he was and he came to do what he said he came to do. He came to make us right with God. He came to remove our reason for fear. His Word is true. Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed!

We have his Word on that. Do not be afraid. But look at something. Look at what happened next: They left that angel, and look at how they were described – v. 8: **“afraid yet full of joy”**...they had his Word announced by angels, and they believe it, but their hearts were still confused, their earth was still kind of shaking.

Even when we know the truth, the fear is still sometimes there, isn’t it? ...mixed with the joy maybe, but still there – so God goes one step farther. Do not be afraid because we have his Word – but now look at this. Do not be afraid – because we have his presence.

Look at verse 9: **“Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid.”** Did you catch that? He says the very same thing, and His Word has power because he is right there backing it up. He didn’t just send Word, but he himself came back – and appeared to these women here and to Mary Magdalene, and to the disciples in the upper room and to the more than 500 on that mountain and to Peter and to Paul... and to you.

No, we don’t see him standing here with these eyes like they did – not yet. We will when he returns physically at the end, but right now it’s not our physical eyes (that can be so easily deceived), it’s not these that we rely on. It is our eyes of faith. We see him through His promises and what he really, physically does.

The apostle Peter, who saw all of these amazing things with his eyes of flesh, wrote that we have **“A more certain thing – the Word of the prophets”** (2 Peter 1:19). As much as these eyes can be deceived and see danger where there is none or not see the danger that is there – we have something more certain – God’s Word – His promises. It is here (Bible) that we see Jesus, the one called “the Word”, the Word that became flesh so that he could remove every single reason for fear for you.

And notice, in our text – the Word made flesh is in perfect harmony with the word sent by Him through the angel. The faithful messenger proclaims the Word faithfully. And they both have the same message. **“Do not be afraid.”** You see, God knows that just because the reason for fear is gone, that doesn’t mean Satan stops attacking. You see how God builds in right here another way to repeat his

message, another way to reinforce in us that we really don't have to fear. God gives us His presence because we need it.

Think about that. Do you realize how important that makes this time every week – where we gather together with our brothers and sisters in Christ? Remember what Jesus promised? Matthew 18:18 – **“Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”** That's what these candles symbolize – when we see the candles lit each week, we are reminded that the Light of the world is really here with us, every time we gather.

We need the reinforcements that there is nothing to fear. So come here and see his presence – and not just on the big holidays. I mean, it is certainly true that he gives us these reminders and attacks our fear on Christmas and Easter – but Satan doesn't just work 2 days a year. The earthquakes of life don't just reserve themselves for the week of High Holy Days in the church year. The earthquakes will come – so you need to see your Savior removing the reason for fear again and again. And he comes to you right here, where, each week, we see the proof in our Savior that allows you to hear the Word when the earthquakes strike like those women did, instead of being paralyzed by fear like those soldiers.

And, as if that promise weren't enough – he reinforces us again, he strengthens us again with the gift of the Lord's Supper we saw instituted on Maundy Thursday that he told us to do in remembrance of him – as he physically comes to us and touches us with His own body and blood for our forgiveness, to tell us again- “Do not be afraid. Your price is paid. The reason for fear is gone.”

FDR was wrong. He didn't go far enough. In Christ, we have absolutely nothing to fear. But before we go – I want us to notice that neither the angels nor Jesus himself stop at the encouragement not to fear. They give us something else to do instead. Look at the text. Both of them remove the fear and then make our new purpose clear.

You have nothing to fear – so go, and tell: Christ is Risen!
He is Risen Indeed! Hallelujah! Amen.