

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our heavenly Father, through the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Matthew 28:1-10 (EHV)

¹ After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. ² Suddenly, there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, and going to the tomb, he rolled away the stone and was sitting on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. ⁴ The guards were so terrified of him that they shook and became like dead men. ⁵ 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. He has risen, just as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. ⁷ Go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has risen from the dead! And look, he is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see him.’ See, I have told you!”

⁸ They hurried away from the tomb, with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!”

They approached, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him.

¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go, tell my brothers that they should go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”

Dear Heavenly Father, send your Holy Spirit on us so that we do not fear, but trust in the words of our resurrected Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Don’t be afraid!”

That’s what the angel said. That’s what angels often say before they announce some good news.

But remember the context: the women had watched their loved one die and were on their way to his tomb, they’d just experienced an earthquake in the pre-dawn darkness, and now they’ve been confronted by bright angels glowing in the dark speaking to them!

“Don’t be afraid!” they said!

Yeah, right! It’s not so easy to turn off our fears!

But the angel was trying to comfort them because, until they stopped being afraid, they wouldn’t hear or believe the good news.

They knew that when we’re afraid we humans won’t act rationally or reasonably. Our fears control us and block all our senses and sensibilities out of a fearful self-preservation mode.

This means, whenever our senses of hearing and sight are restrained by our fears, we can’t really hear or see anything clearly. And even if we could, we’re unlikely to think very clearly when our fears are in control of all our responses.

This means, when we’re afraid, we have a hard time hearing, accepting, or believing the good news of Jesus Christ.

The angel needed them to hear what he was about to say. It was good news which would bring them great joy, but while they’re afraid, they won’t listen properly. The angel needed them to calm down so they could see for themselves the comforting truth he was about to announce.

So, in a similar sense, is there anything you’re afraid of today?

Are you afraid of world events and how they’re impacting you with rising prices and limitations in resources?

Are you afraid of losing your abilities and independence as you get older?
Are you afraid of becoming a burden or a bother to others?
Are you afraid of failing or letting people down?
Are you afraid of what people think of you?
Are you afraid of conflicts, fights, arguments, or disagreements?
Are you afraid of making wrong decisions and losing money or property?
Are you afraid of being wrong or being caught out doing the wrong thing?
Are you afraid of upsetting people?
Are you afraid of dying?

Whatever you're afraid of, how might your fears be stopping you from receiving true joy and comfort in the news of Christ's resurrection? After all, the good news the angel announced is that Jesus is no longer dead. Jesus, our Lord, our Saviour, and our Messiah, has risen from the dead and now lives eternally!

“Don't be afraid!”

This time it's the risen Lord Jesus speaking. It's what he often says before he announces good news.

The frightened women heard the message from the angel about Jesus' resurrection but seemed to be a little conflicted in their response.

We don't know if they checked out the surroundings (including the empty tomb) as the angel invited them, but we're told they ran away from the tomb with two emotions. They were still afraid, but now they also had joy.

But didn't the angel tell them not to be afraid? After being told Jesus had risen, why were they still afraid?

Well, as we already know, it's not so easy to turn off our fears, but their fears must have calmed down enough for them to hear and believe the good news of Christ's resurrection. This meant joy in Jesus' resurrection sat alongside their fears.

If you've ever wondered how fear and joy could possibly sit side-by-side, you might think back to your wedding day, or that moment you became a parent, or when you started a new career, and remember how fear and joy sat side-by-side in your heart and mind!

Thankfully, Jesus further reassured these privileged women of his bodily resurrection. They took hold of his feet: the feet which are so blessed to carry the good news of forgiveness, life, and salvation; the feet which can be touched and held as further proof he was raised bodily; and the feet which is both fully human and fully divine. They worshipped him as their Lord and their God.

“Don't be afraid!” he said. It's what Jesus often says before announcing good news. But he also says it before telling people to do something for him and those he loves.

He tells these women to tell the disciples the good news he's risen from the dead. He tells the women to tell the disciples the risen Lord will meet with them in Galilee. The good news needs to be shared with other people who are afraid.

Jesus has risen from the dead which means all our most fearsome enemies of sin, death, and the devil have been defeated through Jesus' triumphant rising from the grave. Or, to put it more specifically, all our sin is forgiven through the suffering and death of Jesus; the devil no longer owns us because we've been redeemed and bought by the blood of Jesus and are his precious children; and death itself has been overcome by Christ and all those joined to Christ.

Therefore, don't be afraid!

So, how might this help you with all the things you're afraid of?

Well, firstly, you've been given the promise at your baptism the risen Lord is with you always.

Therefore, whenever you're afraid, our risen Lord is with you.

Similarly, even as you age and lose your abilities, the risen Lord (who overcame the indignity of crucifixion) is still with you.

Even if you let people down or are afraid of what people think of you, the risen Lord (who loves you anyway) is still with you.

When you face uncertainty in our world, in employment, in finances, or in relationships, the certainty of God's love, provision, forgiveness, and life eternal is still yours.

Not only this, but even if the worst should happen and you died, you know all those who belong to him through faith will rise with him. If death has lost its grip on Jesus, and you're joined to Jesus through baptism and faith, this means death has also lost its grip on you. Your grave isn't the end. The graves of your loved ones who died in the faith isn't the end. Your grave is but a resting place for living seeds waiting to sprout in new and glorious bodies at the resurrection of all flesh.

The good news for everyone who's afraid is that Jesus didn't just die for the forgiveness of all your sins. Jesus has also died your death for you. Jesus also rose to show you death doesn't have the final word.

Jesus has already carried all your shame, all your guilt, and received all the punishment you're ever going to receive for your wrongs. Your sins are forgiven for the sake of his bitter suffering and death. But he's also entered that great devouring mouth called death. However, instead of being swallowed by that gaping and hideous mouth, Jesus is the One who devoured death itself.

This means none of you need to fear death because its grip on you is slippery. On the other hand, Christ has got a hold of you and he's not going to let you go. In this way, through faith in our risen Lord Jesus Christ and the power of his resurrection, you've already crossed over that dark chasm of death and now live in the light of eternal life. Death has lost its sting and now becomes a welcome doorway to life eternal with Jesus.

Trusting our risen Lord Jesus Christ helps you face your fears. You face them with joy in your heart knowing our Lord and Saviour lives and has given you the promise of life eternal with him. Through faith, nothing you experience in this life negates the promises he gives you! This is why we joyfully confess we believe in the resurrection of the body and life eternal.

While you can't take hold of the feet of our risen Lord, you take hold of his body and blood and receive him into your own body. As you eat and drink in faith at the Lord's Supper, you receive the assurance of his promises of forgiveness, life, and salvation. While you may still be afraid of certain people, certain things, or certain situations, you receive his holy promises and victory over sin, death, and the devil with joy and thanks.

So, whenever you're afraid, listen again to the wonderful words spoken by prophets, angels, eyewitnesses, and the risen Lord himself:

“Don't be afraid!”

Jesus has died for the forgiveness of all your sins. Jesus has risen from the dead which assures you of the resurrection from the dead and life everlasting. Jesus has gone ahead of you into heaven. Jesus will meet

you on the other side of your graves at the appointed time. There you will see him with your own eyes, hear him with your own ears, and hold him with your own hands as he greets you with grace, joy and peace.

In this way, whenever you're afraid, may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in our risen Christ Jesus. Amen.

Pastor Stuart Kleinig
South Burnett Lutheran Parish
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