

Peter M. Antoci  
Easter A  
Matthew 28:1-10

*Stories of Fear & Joy*

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***They left the tomb with fear and joy, to tell his disciples.***

(Matt 28)

When you get right down to it, we have been entrusted with only two things: a life, and a story – and we have to grow into both of them. We are born tiny and fragile, sprung from a single cell that could just as easily have lived or not. This we share with every living organism on earth: a precarious beginning, and let's face it, a razor's edge life from start to finish. But what a gift it is! And we share this with every living thing. Life – a gift, a GRACE, from the very first moment.

But then there is something we don't share with the other forms of life around us: a story. Oh, it's not so much that plants and animals don't have stories of their own, but we are the only ones capable of forming one, telling it, and owning it as our own. And we love to tell stories: from campfire evenings millennia ago, to poetry, novels, operas and films. It seems to be in our nature to tell a story. And this is no small thing. It is no exaggeration to say that without our story we could not be who we are. Without our story we could not be a species, or a nation, or even ourselves. We would only be half a person, not a full human being. That is because there is another dimension to our lives, a spiritual one. I'm not talking about religion *per se*. I'm talking about the inner structure of our consciousness, the substrata of our lives, without which we could never be whole. That is why the stories we carry and the stories we tell are so important. That is why to

deprive, subvert, or coopt the stories of a culture or even of a single person, is in act of violence.

So those are the two things we have: a life and a story. Having been given both of them, we are also entrusted with continuing to write them, for it is in THAT sense that we tell our **OWN** stories. As long as we breath we are adding to that story.

It is Easter, and the resurrection **is** the Christian story. Today we hear Matthew's version. There are two people named Mary, both intimate friends of Jesus. They have come to the tomb to mourn their friend. They have come with their memories, and their grief. They are adding an unwanted chapter to their lives and story, and it comes with fear and joy. That's what Matthew says: they leave the tomb to TELL THIS STORY – THEIR STORY - with fear and joy. You see, stories (like life itself) are living things, not just in the telling, but because every telling is actually a **RE-TELLING**. We may hear or say something we hadn't before. Mary Magdalene and her friend came to this grave with one story in mind: the death of a loved one. But they find themselves confronted with a new, and shocking plot twist in their lives. NO WONDER THEY ARE FEARFUL AND JOYFUL, all at the same time. They are fearful because they could not have imagined what is happening in front of them, and they cannot imagine how to TELL anyone about it. And they are joyful because no story they EVER told about themselves could ever lead them to this. This is a powerful story - as that wise bishop and martyr Oscar Romero once said: ***There are many things that can only be seen through eyes that have cried.*** That certainly describes Jesus' friends. It may even describe you.

As humans we have been entrusted with our life and our story. No doubt you have experienced fear in both, and joy as well. There have been brokenness and healing. There have been failures and successes. There have been death and resurrection. But as Christians we have also been entrusted with Jesus' story. I daresay, we tell it sometimes with fear, and sometimes with joy. Sometimes we tell it with doubt, and sometimes with confidence. Sometimes we tell it poorly, and sometimes brilliantly. But today, as they have for 2000 years, these two women come to tell us again: ***Jesus has risen!*** That is as much a story as it is a challenge and an invitation. Because you see, they have given us THEIR story, based in THEIR life and tears. And in giving that, they remind us of something else Oscar Romero once said: ***The only gospel anyone may ever hear is your life.***

Christ is risen! Matthew, Mary, the guards, and others have told their stories. Go out from this place and tell it in YOUR own words, about YOUR own life. You might do it with fear, and you might do it with joy. But someday, someone is going to need a word of life, or a whisper of hope, and YOUR story may be the only gospel they ever get to hear.