

“Do Not Be Afraid!”

April 9, 2023

Pastor John Mars

When I say, “He has risen!” you respond, “He has risen indeed!” He has risen! He has risen! He has risen! I feel like I've been holding my breath since Friday. I am so glad it's Sunday! Whew! You know, we worship on Sunday instead of on Saturday, because every Sunday is a mini celebration of Easter. I am so glad we do not remember Good Friday every Friday. Good Friday is hard on me. I can't hardly prepare for Easter until it's over.

When we left here Friday night, Jesus was dead. His movement had stopped moving. Death had discredited everything He had claimed, in His followers' eyes. Yes, there were followers, but nobody believed. The resurrection changed all that. The resurrection breathed life into the dead. I want to read one of my four favorite resurrection stories. (A couple of you got that! Only a couple, though. See, there are only four resurrection stories!) Okay, this is one of my four favorites. This is Matthew's story. He says:

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were as white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

The angel said to the women, “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. Then go quickly and tell His disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see Him.’ Now I have told you.”

So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 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. Go and tell My brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see Me.”

May God bless the reading of His Word.

The resurrection turned defeated men and women into victorious and courageous men and women. Without the resurrection, there is no Church. Without the Church, there is no New Testament. Did you know that there was a Christian Church 300 years before there was a Bible? Do you know that? The only explanation for that is the resurrection. I hear people all the time say, “Well, I don't believe in the Bible.” Well, do you believe in the resurrection? It was the resurrection that created us. Without the resurrection, there is no explanation for the Christian Church. They relied on the eyewitness testimonies of Matthew and Luke and John and James, and the testimony of Paul. Without the resurrection, the Church would not exist. And there is no explanation for you being here today, without the resurrection. Today is why we are here.

In our scripture passage, there are three admonitions. In our passage, the angel said, "Do not be afraid. I know why you're here. You're looking for a dead guy. He's not here. He is alive. And go and tell His disciples." As they went to tell the disciples, Jesus met them and He said the same thing: "Do not be afraid. It is Me, Myself, and I. I am not dead!" He showed them. In the last week of Jesus' life, when His disciples were arguing about who was going to be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, He said, "If you want to be great in My kingdom, you must be a servant. And if you want to be the greatest, you must be a slave to everyone." And then he demonstrated. He told them and then He showed them. He took a towel, and He washed their feet. On the night that He was betrayed, He said, "A new commandment I give to you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you too must love one another. By this will all people know you are My disciples, by the way you love one another." He told them and then He showed them (pointing to the cross). He had told them that He was going to die. He had told them He would be raised from the dead, but He knew they could not hear what He was saying. So that Easter Sunday morning, He showed them.

In our passage there are three imperatives: Believe, share, and rejoice. This is one of my four favorite passages of the resurrection because of what the angel did. The angel descended from heaven, and he rolled the stone away. Now, I don't know what angels look like. The only angel I have ever seen is my wife! But this angel was so fearful, these four Roman soldiers became like dead men. You ever heard the term "scared stiff"? But he rolled the stone away. And when he rolled the stone away, Jesus did not come striding out. You know why? He was already gone. The angel rolled the stone away so that the women could get in. He rolled the stone away so the disciples could get in. He rolled the stone away so that you and I could get in. The empty tomb is that important. Believe. Then share. Jesus is alive. We do not serve a dead Savior; we serve a risen Savior. Share, by the way you live. Jesus showed us how to love. Follow that example. Last, but certainly not least: Rejoice. There is one regrettable thing that takes place in this passage. It's not in the passage, really; it is in the interpretation of the passage. When Jesus greets the ladies, in my scripture it says that He says, "Greetings." If you've been dead three days, you don't say, "Greetings." And that's not what He said. It is a greeting, but it's not "Greetings." What he said was, "Rejoice! Rejoice!" And that is the word I want to leave you with today: Rejoice. There is no explanation for us (the Church), outside of today. And I want you to give thanks. I want you to rejoice. I want you to believe and I want you to share. We are proof of the resurrection. He has risen! He has risen! He has risen!

Let us pray together: Gracious God, we are so, so very grateful for the resurrection. We are so very grateful for an empty tomb. We are so very grateful for You living in our lives. And Lord, this day, this day of days, we pause and give thanks. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.