

Sermon for Sunday – April 9 – Easter Sunday Morning

Matthew 28:1-11

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the wonderings of our minds reveal your wisdom in our time, God of life and light. Amen

Today is our High Holy Day. Easter is Christianity's big celebration. It is beautiful colourful banners, spring flowers, and robust singing. It is a packed house and friends and family - home visiting. Regardless the weather outside the atmosphere inside the church is joyous, upbeat and celebratory. It is a good morning.

We began our celebration at 6:15 this morning on the Wildwood Hill singing Hallelujahs – sharing communion – praying and enjoying the stunning sunrise.

Every year, someone says to me after our Easter celebration “Wouldn't it be great if it were like this every Sunday?” I usually smile and nod in agreement.

That nod is a lie. I do *not* want every Sunday to be like Easter - the same way I do not want every meal to be Saskatoon Berry pie - and I really enjoy Saskatoon Berry pie.

To be honest I have spent most of this past week feeling rather grumpy. It's not that I dislike Easter. My faith is grounded in this day, wrestles with the meaning of this day, yearns for the truth of this day like no other day. I cherish Easter.

So, what's the source of my grumpiness? Well, I worry... I worry that in our rush to make a big deal about Easter, we sidestep the deep places this day wants to take us.

Friends, big crowds and Rice Crispy bunnies are not what makes Easter special.

According to the Bible, the first Easter was *not* a runway for displaying new outfits, pastel bowties, and glorious hats. It was two women walking through a cemetery dressed in black – dressed in the clothes you wear when your heart is torn up by grief.

The first Easter was *not* a chorus of angelic voices, it was (according to the Gospel of Matthew) an earthquake – a grand shaking that cracked stones and opened graves. It was an angel descending on the wings of a **storm** – an angel that looked, Scripture says, like lightning!

The first Easter was *not* photos of a cozy brunch posted to Instagram. The disciples did not toast their good fortune with flutes of mimosas. No - on the first Easter, Christ's followers were in hiding. They were sheltering in place. They were shaking in terror – worried about what would happen if they stuck their heads out-of-doors, worried that they too would end up nailed to a cross.

The first Easter wasn't a victory lap. It wasn't confetti and applause. It wasn't a celebration at all. The first Easter dawned on a world saturated with fear, haunted by death, shaken, and brightened only by the loving actions of a few brave women who made their way to a tomb.

The first Easter was soaked in fear. The Bible makes this crystal clear.

- The soldiers guarding the tomb of Jesus fall to the ground in fear.
- Upon seeing Mary Magdalene and the other Mary standing at the entrance to the tomb, the very first words out of the angel's mouth are, "Do not fear."
- When the women flee the garden cemetery, they run *in fear*.

Fear was in the air that first Easter. // When you think about it a little.

That *first* Easter was a lot like *this* Easter.

Let's look at our current fear it comes from so many places.

1. The brutal war in Ukraine and the relentless hostilities in Palestine and Israel makes us fearful, fearful for those whose lives are being shredded by these terrible conflicts – fearful for humanity itself.
2. We worry that the fabric of our own society has been torn beyond repair by angry politics.
3. We fear for ourselves, too. We fear getting test results back from the doctor. The granddaddy of all fears – the fear of death. Nothing pumps fear through our veins like picturing an empty grave waiting to claim us.
4. We worry over children who struggle.
5. We worry that we will run out of funds before we run out of month. How will we cover the grocery bill, or pay for prescriptions, or keep the lights on.

Friends - Easter leans into all this fear. Easter ushers anxious hearts right out to the cemetery. The two Marys' are afraid. Who wouldn't be? They fear for their safety. They fear for their fading faith, their tattered hopes. They fear the forces of darkness have won and will *always* win. They fear the world is an irredeemably violent and malicious place, devoid of good, and full of tombs that hold all that is dear to us.

Death and fear perfume Easter.

But here's the thing; and yes, this sentiment comes straight from my grumpy heart. I take comfort in the fact that Easter starts this way. The backdrop to our holiest of days is dire, but *this*, my friends, *this* is what makes Easter "special." This is why Easter matters. We celebrate that first,

fear-soaked Easter over and over, because it was there, in the trenches of Holy Week, that **we learned who God really is.**

God, it turns out, does *not* do distancing. God steps into places where death lurks and fear undoes us. God stands with us – always with us. And when our hopes teeter, God does what only God can do. The Almighty declares that Jesus - this wise teacher, this caring healer, this gracious friend, this beloved child of heaven – is not dead.

Jesus is not finished – not now, not ever. The tomb is empty; and this changes everything.

Matthew puts it like this: “The two women left the tomb quickly with **fear and great joy.**” Did you catch the shift? Fear hasn’t been vanquished, not yet, but when Easter dawns, **fear is joined by a companion: Joy.** Great joy.

Joy is rooted in the actions of Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. The two women race to tell the disciples. *The tomb is empty. He’s out there. Death could not stop the goodness of God. The love of Christ persists. The promise endures, his outlandish promise, “I am with you always.” It’s true.* Jesus is on the loose.”

Listen again to how Matthew describes it: *Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.’*

He’s out there. He’s on the loose. You can find him in Galilee. You can find him wherever you are. You can find him in Saskatoon and Radville. You can find him everywhere, in Ukraine, and in Palestine, you can find him in the doctor’s office and the food bank - wherever fear and death haunt this mean old world you will find him.

“Do not be afraid,” Jesus said to the women. “Tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

Fear and loss mark the start of our most sacred story, but then our fear and anxiety comes face to face with history’s most famous vacancy. On Easter we cheer an empty tomb. The source of hope and joy for all humanity is *not here*. Our resurrected Lord is out there. In Galilee... binding the forces of chaos and death with a simple litany:

“I love you. I will not abandon you.”

This, my friends, is the heart of Easter. Even in the hardest of times – especially in the hardest of times – God will not abandon us. Christ will find us. *This* is the truth that makes the women run, and the faithful sing with joy.

Jesus is on the loose.

God has given us a living hope.

“I love you. I will not abandon you.”

Christ is risen.

Alleluia. Amen.