

Second Sunday after Easter
Christ Church Episcopal 2024
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The concept of fear seems to play a significant role in all the resurrection narratives.

In Mark's gospel, the last word in his last chapter is "Afraid". Verse 8 of the 16th chapter says: "So they (the three women) went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

Biblical Scholars agree that the gospel of Mark ends there. "for they were afraid"

Isn't that strange?

Perhaps that is why the longer version of Mark's gospel adds a few post resurrection stories. Scholars agree that verses 9 through 19 of the 16th chapter were added by someone else. Someone who felt that the ending of Mark's writing was incomplete.

But Mark is not alone. The concept of fear plays a prominent role in the other gospel writers. In today's gospel from John, fear and doubt are the main theme. John says that the disciples were locked behind doors because they were afraid.

John goes on to say that Jesus showed himself to the disciples, yet fear didn't disappear. John says that Jesus reappeared to them a week later. They were still under locked doors. Still afraid! Why?

When you think about it, meeting a person who was once dead is scary in itself?

When I was growing up in my village, I remember being scared of passing by the cemetery at night. It was widely believed that the spirits of the dead wake up at night. Nobody wants to encounter those dead ancestors.

I was surprised when I came to this country and found how well cemeteries are kept. I saw people go to visit their loved ones in the cemetery. You will not find flowers in the cemetery. Nobody visits and if one is seen visiting, they are labeled as witches. People are afraid of the dead. Perhaps that explains the disciples' fear. Encountering a dead person is scary.

At the same time, I can imagine the disciples being scared of meeting the person who a few days earlier they had deserted and denied. Would you want to get together with someone you betrayed? What would Jesus say to them?

But the gospels indicate that, they were afraid of the Jews. They were afraid of being the next to be crucified.

Whatever the case is, fear is an overarching theme in the resurrection narratives.

In the field of psychology and therapy, it is widely held that fear is behind most individual and social problems. Fear is behind many anti-social behaviors. Fear breeds negativity. When I am afraid, I see impossibilities, I see dangers, I exaggerate the negativity and minimize better outcomes. In other words, fear blocks hope, and nurtures pessimism and hatred.

Fear breeds violence. Hate can be described as a form of fear. Even for animals, it is when they are afraid that they attack.

Fear interferes with the good news of salvation. Because it locks up the soul. It rejects grace, and the good news. When we are afraid, we end up in hopelessness.

I think that one of the reasons we are afraid is because we want to be in control of the future, and of our environment. We worry about what tomorrow will bring. Our sense of trust disappears. We feel vulnerable. In a sense we feel naked. And we want to find a safe place to be. For the disciples, a locked room was that safe place to be.

Yes, fear is a recurring theme of Easter. No wonder the recurring message from Jesus is “Peace”. Peace be with you! Jesus tells the disciples many times over. Be at peace! Trust in the Lord

Peace is not the absence of strife or war. Peace is not the absence of storms and tribulation. Jesus offered his peace and was well aware that his disciples will face trial and tribulation

Peace is the presence of the spirit of God. Where the Spirit of God resides, fear loses its grip. Fear only survives where the spirit of God is absent.

Do not be afraid! Be at peace!

Being at peace means letting go and letting God. Fear is when we cannot let go. Peace is a total surrender to God’s love and mercy. Peace is knowing that all is well, even in the midst of storms and tribulation. All is well with my soul.

There must be a reason Jesus said over and over “peace be with you”. Without Peace in our hearts, the Easter message is difficult to comprehend. We cannot encounter Jesus if we are afraid. The three women could not encounter Jesus because they were afraid. We cannot experience the power of the risen Christ, if we are locked up in our upper rooms.

Peace be with you, Jesus told his disciples. Receive the Holy Spirit!

The disciples were filled with the Holy spirit, and from that time on, they were transformed. They were never the same. Fear was replaced with hope and courage. Because they knew the Spirit of God was within them. Even in the midst of dangers they were facing, fear was a thing of the past. Self-centeredness was replaced with total surrender

This is what we read in the acts of the apostles this morning. People who had nothing in common. People of different races, economic backgrounds, got together to share their goods with one another. There was no need to be afraid because God was in control.

My friends, that is the power of the resurrection. We cannot encounter the risen Christ and remain unchanged. If we open our hearts and let the spirit of the risen Lord into our hearts we will be transformed and the world around us will be transformed. Miracles will happen.

When Jesus gets a hold of our life and we know the power of his resurrection, we act like he did: giving and serving, not being served. Sharing with others and receiving from them. We are emboldened to carry each other's crosses.

It is not a secret that we live in a fractured society. Fear, anxiety, and distrust have become the norm. Like the apostles, we have locked ourselves in our different rooms, afraid of the other. Afraid to love and to be loved. Fear is holding the world hostage.

We need the message of Easter. Don't be afraid! We need the transformative power of the resurrection, to set us free from the bondage of fear and hatred.

Let us take heart in the Easter message. Let us take refuge in the first words that came from the mouth of Jesus. Peace be with you!

Do not despair even in the face of the wars and conflict. Do not give up hope even in the face of the great divide in our country. Do not be afraid. Trust and have faith in the redeeming power of the risen Christ.

Of course, being at peace does not mean we sit back and do nothing. The disciples didn't sit back and do nothing. Indeed, they ministered to one another harder than before. They carried each other's burdens. They got to work to build God's kingdom on earth. They loved deeply and forgave generously.

May the peace of Christ that surpasses all human understanding be with us evermore. **Amen**