

## Sermon for Easter Day 2011

+In the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

"Do not be afraid." Twice Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph are told to remain calm, and we've sufficiently sterilized the Easter story so that we likely have no idea what they have to be afraid of. But look a little more closely to see what's actually going on, and I think we'd be a bit frightened, too, were we there.

First, we have the angel who causes an earthquake by his very presence, and whose "appearance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow." The Marys were lucky not to have fainted, but after following Jesus around for a few years it's no surprise that their constitutions were stronger than those of Pilate's guards (who did faint). Of course we ought not be surprised that the angel was frightening. Over and over again in scripture, angels are having to tell the

recipients of whatever good news they bring to stay calm.

But then, the second time the Marys are told "Do not be afraid", their reason for fear seems a bit less obvious. It's Jesus, after all: their old familiar friend. Of course, we know the end of the story so it ceases to surprise us.

But place yourself back in one of the Mary's sandals. You've been following Jesus around for a few years and you've seen some tremendous things. You've seen the feeding of five-thousand people from barely enough to feed five; you've seen a blind man receive sight; you've seen the lame made whole; you've even seen your friend Lazarus brought back from the dead.

But this... this is what we'd call categorically different. You see, bad things happen, but they're usually not the end of the world. If five thousand people go hungry or the blind man stays blind or the lame man remains on his pallet or Lazarus

remains in his tomb the world still keeps on spinning. But if the one on whom you've founded all your hope for freedom—which is in fact what all the disciples had done—if he dies at the hands of the very force which oppresses you (whether that *force* is the Roman Empire or sin itself) then it's "game over".

For heaven's sake, you were there. You were at the foot of the Cross when the one you loved more than life itself had been brutally murdered. You saw all your hope come crashing down and you couldn't do a thing to stop it.

And then, here he is, three days later, standing right in front of you on the road. Is it a terrible trick? An hallucination brought about by hysteria? You touch his feet, and they feel more real than anything you've touched before. He lifts you up, and you see him again face-to-face as if nothing had happened. You had better believe your confusion would turn to fear (not just

apprehension, but honest-to-God fear), and it would happen pretty quickly. Fear.. and joy.

We've all felt that at some point. You hold your child in your arms and you feel the greatest joy imaginable and sheer terror all at once. You fall in love with somebody, and you cannot disentangle the ecstasy and the absolute panic which seem to assault your heart all at once.

It seems to me that there are two things more terrifying than anything else in the whole world: the future and the power of God. If we truly believe there is no future, then we may well be depressed but we won't be afraid, because what's there to be afraid of? If we really don't believe there's a God, then we need not fear death or judgment. But then, if there is no future and there is no God then there isn't joy or hope either. Life becomes disconnected from that which grounds it, disconnected from meaning and purpose.

What the Marys discover on their way back from the tomb and what we discover again this morning is that there is a future, and that our future is in God's hands. God is not dead; He is still very much alive. That means we don't have the luxury of wallowing around in the melancholy we find so terribly comfortable. Jesus himself might even show up, right in front of us, and scare us out of the gloomy hell we have chosen to live in; the tombs we walk around in looking for the dead, not expecting to be startled by the living. Let's be ready this Eastertide for Jesus to scare us out of the gloom and into a future which holds for us the only hope we have of everlasting joy.

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Amen.