

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. ² Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb ³ and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

⁴ But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. ⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

⁶ "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.' "

⁸ Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid. (NIV 84)

Theme: Jesus' Resurrection Removes all Fear

1. His payment has been accepted.
2. Eternal life is guaranteed.

What scares you the most? What are you afraid of? Perhaps you are afraid of snakes or spiders, or public speaking. Maybe you are afraid of heights—which reminds of a grown man in his 40's who was afraid of heights. He was once at a water park with his kids who wanted to go on the tall water slide. So he ignored his fears and climbed the steps with his children. He sent his children down the slide but when it was time for him to go he couldn't do it; he was too afraid. He had to shamefully walk back down the stairs, pushing through the crowds until he back on solid ground. There are times when we can't get over our fears; despite how ridiculous it may seem, we just can't get over them.

We all have our fears, everyone is afraid of one thing or another. But today we see that Jesus' resurrection removes all fear because his payment for our sins has been accepted and our eternal life is guaranteed.

Just a few days ago Jesus died. His followers were in shock. They didn't expect this to happen. They believed he was the Son of God, the Promised Messiah—the Savior of the world. Jesus wasn't supposed to die. He was supposed to save them. They had followed this man around for three years learning from him. They were afraid to face their friends and family. They would probably be mocked and ridiculed for wasting three years of their lives. They didn't know what the rest of their lives entailed; their future was with Jesus, but now he's in the grave.

They were also afraid of what might happen to them—would they be next. Jesus was betrayed by one of his own disciples, one of their companions; and his own countrymen handed him over to the Romans to be executed. If they were able to kill Jesus, who performed miracles, case out demons, and even raised people from the dead, what would they be able to do to defend themselves? So they hid. They locked themselves in a room together—alone and afraid, staying low in fear of the Jews.

There are times in our lives when we should be afraid of something, but we aren't. More people are afraid of flying than driving; but far more people die in car accidents each year. But the number of people who die by heart disease or stroke far out numbers those who die in car accidents each year. There are things that we should be afraid of, but we aren't.

Another such example is our sins. God demands perfection. God demands that we obey all of his commands perfectly—always putting him first in our lives and always loving others more than we love ourselves. And if we fail to do so—even if we stumble and fall just once, then we are guilty; and the punishment is death—eternal death. For each and every one of our sins the price we ought to pay is eternal damnation in hell. And yet we like to downplay our sins as if they are no big deal. You make excuses, you claim ignorance, you say that you will stop committing that sin at some time just not right now; you tell yourself that everyone is doing it, so it can't be that big of a deal. But it is in the eyes of the Lord—big enough for Jesus to willingly give up his life on the cross! He did so because he knew there is nothing we can do to make up for our sins—no sort of payment we could make.

Three days after Jesus died, on Sunday morning before the sun had completely risen a group of women went to Jesus tomb to finish giving him a proper burial. As they approached they noticed that the large stone that had been in front of the tomb had been rolled away. They rushed into the tomb to see what was going on and to their amazement they saw a young man—not Jesus, sitting in the tomb. We know from the other accounts that this was an angel—Mark underemphasizes his appearance saying he was wearing a white robe. Matthew says, **his appearance was like lightning and his clothes were as white as snow.** The women realized it wasn't any normal man and they were alarmed, you could even say afraid.

But the angels worked quickly to deaden their fears, **Don't be alarmed You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.** Jesus was no longer dead! He is the Son of God; he is the Savior of the world. He proved his power over death by rising from the dead—just as he said he would!

And his resurrection from the dead is proof that God accepted his sacrifice. That the payment he made for our sins by shedding his blood on the cross and giving us his perfect life was pleasing to the Lord. Paul says in Romans 4, **(God) raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.** God raised Jesus from the dead so he could declare us not guilty—that is what justification means, its God our righteous judge declaring us not guilty on account of Christ. The Lord raised Jesus from the dead as proof that he accepted Christ's payment for our sin so that he could declare us pure and holy in his sight! As great as Good Friday is, by itself, it doesn't remove fear. It depends on Easter. As Paul points out in 1 Corinthians 15, **If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.** But Christ has been raised from the dead, so we don't have to be afraid of our sins; we don't have to be afraid of eternal life in hell, which our sins deserve. Because Christ paid for our sins on the cross and God accepted that payment by raising our Lord from the dead!

Out of all the fears and phobias that people have on this earth, perhaps what people fear the most is death. That is because death is the great unknown. There are no videos or pictures, or even eye witness accounts of what happens at death. We know the here and the now.

We know what life is like on this earth—but we don't know what's beyond this life. And so death is the one fear that many people just can't get over.

But in our second lesson Paul says, **Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.** Right about now the first flowers of the spring are just popping out of the ground. The first sight of tulips and daises and so on is a guarantee that more flowers are sure to come. The same stands with a harvest. The first fruit on a plant or a tree is a guarantee that there will be more to come. If there is a first, then there must be a second, a third, and many more to follow!

Christ is the firstfruits of the dead. He wasn't the first person to die and be raised, but he was the first person to be raised and stay alive. And his life is a guarantee that we too will rise from the dead. That fact that he rose with a perfect and glorious body is proof that we our bodies too will be raised from the dead. On the Last Day Christ will come and give life to our bodies. Paul says in Philippians 3 that Christ, **will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.**

And so we know where we will be in the end. With our perfect glorified bodies we will join our Savior in heaven and there we will live with him and see him as he is. So death then is the beginning of a new and everlasting life.

So there is no reason to be afraid—of anything. There is no reason to be afraid of man—what they might do to us or say about us. In the end we will be in heaven with our Savior. And so we can say along with the Psalmist in Psalm 118, **The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?**

And there is no reason to fear death. It may be the great unknown. It may be painful to die; it may mean that our life on earth is over and that our bodies are buried six feet under. It is true that death is unnatural—God never wanted our bodies and souls to be separated. Yet there is nothing to fear because that separation is only temporary. Christ's resurrection has made something horrible into that which bring eternal life. While our bodies rest peacefully—looking forward to the Last Day, our souls are busy enjoying the glory of heaven. Death brings something far better than anything in this life—to depart and be with Christ is far better, as Paul says in Philippians.

During our sunrise service this morning we sang the hymn, “In Christ Alone.” The opening lines of the final stanza are a good summary of the results of Christ’s victory over death in our lives, “No guilt in life, no fear in death—This is the pow’r of Christ in me.”

All of us have our own fears; we may be afraid of many different things. For many, death is on top of that list. There is no reason to be afraid of death or dying; it may not be pleasant, but by his death on the cross he removed sin—the sting of death, and by his resurrection Jesus destroyed death and gives us the sure hope of everlasting life. Amen.