

Easter begins with an unusual scene –two women come to the tomb, the earth quakes, an angel sits on top of the stone, and the guards faint.

Fear spreads, but also great joy.

The tomb is empty.

Life is stronger than death.

Where does this fear come from?

From the fact that God defeats the powers that otherwise have the final say.

From the recognition that God does not permit injustice, violence, and death to have the last word, but instead gives justice to the righteous.

Out of our mortal fear of death comes our reverent fear of God.

At the same time, great joy emerges: Jesus lives.

On Easter, the gates of God's new heaven and new earth open.

We are invited to come in.

- You who are sick and need help and consolation do not remain alone.
- You who have heaped guilt upon yourselves, the risen Jesus helps you to carry the load.
- Whoever is stranger, alien, and fleeing for refuge is welcome through these doors.
 - Enemies are reconciled.
 - The hungry are filled.
 - The good news spreads: Do not fear!

The two women – Mary Magdalene and the other Mary – go early on that Easter morning to the grave.

They want to say goodbye to Jesus.

They are prepared for an intimate encounter –

- they want to care for their deceased friend,
- to mourn him,
- to pray for him,
- and together to remember the time they spent with him.

In other words, the two women simply wanted to do for Jesus what anyone does when someone they love dies.

But the touching and sorrowful farewell scene comes to nothing.

- The earth quakes violently,
- the sky is bright as with lightning,
- and in the glaring light there is a **role reversal**.
 - The heavy stone that closed off the entrance to the tomb rolled as if by itself to the side.
 - The powerful, well-armed soldiers faint in fear.
 - Heaven's gate is opened.
 - Christ does not allow himself to be locked away and confined – not by thick rocks, not by well-armed guards.
 - **The tomb is empty. Christ is risen.**

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Right before the eyes of the women, a change of power takes place.

If before, death had the last word, now God has rendered death utterly powerless.

- The women are afraid. But their fear is no longer of death – it is reverence for God.

- It is frightening that God can turn everything upside-down and still overcome death.

Until Easter, death threatened our mind, our body, and our heart; but also gave us a final certainty.

You know the saying – there is nothing certain but death and taxes. Even in semi-jest We call on death when we have no other resort: “I’ll kill myself” or “I’ll kill him”.

It is scary to think: What can we rely on if death is no longer certain?

Fear also comes into play because there are suddenly new questions of justice.

- Now, things aren’t simply over and done with and forgotten.
- The guards keel over and are as dead.
- Jesus the paschal victim is alive.
- Easter gives justice to the victim against the perpetrators,
 - against all those who with their power and force flout the law and what is right
 - who bully those weaker than they
- Since death is no longer final,
 - no longer the period at the end of the sentence of life,
 - **the perpetrators of injustice must answer for themselves at God’s judgment seat**
 - and victims receive new courage to stand up for themselves.

We already have a glimpse of how God’s judgment will go, for Jesus clearly pointed to it in his own life:

He dealt with people kindly and with the goal of reconciliation,

but at the same time in clear opposition to injustice and those who wield violence.

The scriptures indicate that not only are the high and mighty unjust,

but also our hardness of heart when dealing with others

and how we seek to gain at others' expense.

Jesus blessed the victims –

- the poor in wealth and in spirit,
- those who make peace,
- and those who are merciful.
- Who can stand before this righteous God?

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In answer, the angel speaks the decisive word: *“Fear not!” I know that you seek Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here. He has been raised from the dead, as he said. He goes ahead of you to Galilee! You will see him there.*

Through the crack in the door that Christ has opened into the new heaven and the new earth,

Jesus himself comes to meet us.

– we go together with him into our world and together with him, change our world to be like him.

He reassures us and gives us courage to live intentionally as godly people, which we are as baptized children of God.

We need not fear that now everything will fall apart since death is defeated. **Jesus goes with us.**

In fact, the angel binds the encouraging word “Fear not!” with great confidence in the women and an assignment for them:

they are to go to the others who followed Jesus and tell them:
Christ is risen!

There is something distinctive about this Easter faith:

it is both proclamation and confirmation of the truth.

And it also entrusts this new life to us.

This faith – Christ is risen – raises us to new life and urges us to live upright lives

so that others can be raised up.

The great commission for the church – Go, make disciples of all nations – begins here on Easter.

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The two women start out with fear and great joy. He is not here. He is risen. They go to pass on this message, so that the others can also rejoice.

On the way, they encounter the living Jesus.

The risen Lord, is not somewhere else, but here with us!

They fall before him. Again, they hear from him the words the angel had already told them: Fear not!

Strengthened and full of confidence that Jesus was with them, they continue their way and tell the good news to the others.

Christ is risen – he is present today and today goes with us and is already in our future.

But what about suffering? How can we reconcile our experience of life with this Easter news?

When I think of the attacks of the last week –

- about those killed at worship on Palm Sunday in Alexandria,
- about the chemical gas victims in Syria,
- and those killed by our own missile strikes

Doubts arise – Is Jesus indeed dead, that these things continue to plague us?

Shouldn't we be afraid of those who kill, those who can take our life?

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No! The good news of Easter rings defiantly in our ears:

Fear not! I am with you!

Death cannot hold Jesus back.

Violence does not defeat justice.

God sets everything right.

Christ goes with us into his new heaven and new earth, -- not as escaping to a different place – **but as a new way of being -- here.**

Fear not -- He strengthens us and shows us the way.

Whenever anxiety threatens to overwhelm us, about ourselves or someone we love,

The risen Lord Jesus comes alongside us,

takes our hand, and sends us people who are there for us and who say: *Fear not. Neither death nor any power on earth can snatch this person out of God's hand.*

When we see people exploiting others,

considering them of less value and treating them with contempt and even hatred,

Christ meets us on the road and says: "fear not.

Have courage.

Speak out against those evil words that sow discord and make for bad blood.

Get in the middle when injustice is being done and call it for what it is.

Worry about the needs of the weak and dispossessed, as if it were me.

Fear not! Christ is risen. He lives.

He goes with you and ahead of you into your future.

There is nothing left to be afraid of – and everything to live for.

Because Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Amen