

Sermon – Matthew 28:1-10
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Grace Lutheran Church
Easter – Year A
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“With Fear and Great Joy”

Alleluia! Christ is risen! *He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!*

1. Springtime, blessedly, is upon us. In our family, springtime means backyard time. In these recent days I've spent time pitching to my kids as they hone their swings; we work on the intricacies of how best to grip and release a Frisbee so that it glides toward its intended recipient, although more often than not it lands on the roof of the garage. We eat outside often now, sitting on the deck and enjoying the last lingering of the daylight. These moments spent together are perfect, until they aren't. The current scourges afflicting our backyard reveries are bees. The appearance of a bee throws our children into fits of terror and shrieking. Our kids are afraid of bees, so afraid that Torsten, just to be safe, flees in fear from any flying insect. You know, just in case. Our children are not, so far as we know, allergic to bees, so there's no real danger, but *that* line of parental logic has yet to produce any comfort. Come to think of it, parental logic rarely seems to work in any situation. Still, it is not the bee itself that creates this childhood fear; it is the thought of being stung. Someday, probably (I hope?) our children will learn that bees don't pose a serious threat to their well-being, but someday has yet to come.
2. In these days, I catch myself wishing that I shared this childhood fear of bees, for it would be a fear I could outgrow. My fears, our fears, are of a different order in these days. We see images of rogue states parading missiles through the streets. We read headlines of cold wars threatening to grow hot. We hear of bombs nicknamed “mother” creating destruction on an epic scale. We see fear in the faces of refugees and all those who suffer under the yoke of

tyranny and terror. In the face of such things it is hard to not be afraid – not so much of these things themselves, perhaps, but because they remind us of the ever-present sting of death. Fear has a way of setting up shop in our hearts, worming its way into our bones, keeping us awake in the long watches of the night. Fear lingers, never far away.

3. It is with fear that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, Jesus' own mother, went to the tomb early on a Sunday long ago. Fear that God's promises were bankrupt; fear that they and their friends might be next; fear of facing a life without this beloved friend, teacher, and son; fear that death's sting really was the last word. (Pause.) And then, an earthquake, the earth itself groaning in the labor pains of the new creation. Then, an angel of the Lord flashing like lightning, speaking the most impossible words: "He is not here; for he has been raised." What do the women feel upon hearing these words? Fear. Yes, great joy welling up as hope against hope, but also fear. Fear that the words are a mockery of their grief. Fear that Jesus would come back bringing judgment and vengeance. Fear, perhaps most simply, that as awful as death is, at least it is dependable.
4. *But then.* But then, simply, Jesus. He speaks. "Greetings," he cries out, but the translation here is a little too fancy; the words he utters are the simple "Good morning" of a man spotting friends while out for a morning walk. He speaks, and the night of fear fades away as the Son rises with light and life beginning to peek over the horizon. He speaks, and the Word through which all creation came into being bestows new creation upon Mary and Mary, upon you and me. He speaks, and casts out their fear, our fear, once and for all. For this Jesus who was dead is dead no longer. He has arisen and we shall arise and nothing will ever be the same. The new day has dawned, and night shall come no more.

5. On a pale, gray, winter morning in 1965, people from Great Britain and around the world watched as Winston Churchill was laid to rest. He had helped guide his people through some of the most fearful moments our world had ever seen. In Churchillian fashion he had planned the service himself. After the benediction, a bugler high in the dome of St. Paul's mournfully intoned "Last Post," whose notes signified both the end of the day and the end of life. In the British tradition, however, this was not the end. As the last note of "Last Post" faded, another bugler from the other end of the dome played "Reveille" – it's time to get up in the morning.

6. Death, you see, simply does not get to play the last note. Death will not have the last word. *God will not allow it*, and in the resurrection of Jesus Christ the rule and reign of the grave have been overturned once and for all. The women fall at Jesus' feet and hang for dear life, for dear life – abundant and eternal – is what Jesus has come to give. Fear is cast out, and death has lost its sting. Like the women, we cling on this Easter morning to the One who puts himself into our ears through his word and into our mouths with bread and wine. The only things that have anything to fear in this Easter-shaped world are the powers of sin, death, and the devil, for Christ is on the loose and has put them to flight. But for you, there is no reason to fear any longer. Death is dead. You are alive; you are forgiven. Seek, as Paul encourages us, the things that are above. For Jesus' death is your own, and his life, alive in you, is the most surprising yet the realest thing of all.

7. Bees will continue to buzz, nations will continue to rage, and the world will continue to groan. But do not be afraid, for the sting has been removed. Jesus was dead. And now he is not. The mysteries of God have, in Easter, become really quite straightforward. His tomb is empty; there's plenty of room to leave your fears inside. Walk now, blinking, into the dazzling light of the resurrected Christ. Live with hope to the glory of God, speaking and working

peace and life. Cling to Jesus, for his joy is yours now forever. Good morning, indeed. Amen.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!