

The Propers and Fr. Andy's Sermon for: Year A, Easter Sunday

The Collect

Almighty God, who through your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ overcame death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life: Grant that we, who celebrate with joy the day of the Lord's resurrection, may be raised from the death of sin by your life-giving Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Acts 10:34-43

Peter began to speak to Cornelius and the other Gentiles: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ--he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

Confitemini Domino

- 1 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; *
his mercy endures for ever.
- 2 Let Israel now proclaim, *
"His mercy endures for ever."
- 14 The LORD is my strength and my song, *
and he has become my salvation.
- 15 There is a sound of exultation and victory *
in the tents of the righteous:
- 16 "The right hand of the LORD has triumphed! *
the right hand of the LORD is exalted!
the right hand of the LORD has triumphed!"
- 17 I shall not die, but live, *
and declare the works of the LORD.
- 18 The LORD has punished me sorely, *
but he did not hand me over to death.
- 19 Open for me the gates of righteousness; *
I will enter them;
I will offer thanks to the LORD.
- 20 "This is the gate of the LORD; *
he who is righteous may enter."
- 21 I will give thanks to you, for you answered me *
and have become my salvation.
- 22 The same stone which the builders rejected *
has become the chief cornerstone.

23 This is the LORD's doing, *
and it is marvelous in our eyes.

24 On this day the LORD has acted; *
we will rejoice and be glad in it.

Colossians 3:1-4

If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

Matthew 28:1-10

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

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"Do not be afraid," is terribly good advice; truly some of the best I've ever heard from anyone, at any time. And yet, I'm afraid it's far easier said than done, even when it comes this morning from the lips of a faithful and true messenger of the One who is wholly Good and entirely Holy. Because according to our Gospel this morning, on that particular day when the LORD uniquely acted as never before; and in such a manner as to forever cast away our fear of death itself – that when He acted so as to be certain that we would rejoice and be glad – even around that tomb which had been miraculously emptied of everything else worthy of note - fear is nonetheless, in no short supply. And when those who witnessed the first rock-solid evidence of the Resurrection are told, flat out, "Do not be afraid," by the only one in that chaotic scene

who has any real sense of what's actually going on, it's almost as if they can't help themselves. Because it's not as if they just ignore what the angel of the Lord is telling them, or as if they're being willfully disobedient to his instructions. After all, he also instructs them to "go quickly and tell the Lord's disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.'"

And so, they left the tomb quickly, and ran to tell his disciples just that. And yet, they did so, not only with "great joy," but also, with "fear" - with that human emotional and physiological response they had just been instructed to abandoned at the tomb. To abandon it, as if fear itself was now as useful to them and their task, as the discarded burial cloths were to their now resurrected Master.

And think about this, it's not as if these two women could be mistaken, in any way, shape, or form, as "faint of heart." When all but one of His Apostles had abandoned Christ, to suffer the pain, and shame, and fear of the Cross alone, these two were not about to be even dragged away from Him. No, they sat at His feet till the bitter end. While those men, who'd been previously sent out by Jesus to fearlessly carry His Good News to ends of the earth, sat cowering behind locked doors for fear of persecution, or even just the fear of being associated in any way with the defeated Messiah –the Marys, at the first possible opportunity, willingly rush in, where seemingly all others – apart from literal angels - fear to tread. They all but waltz their way into what might very well be a trap, intended to snare any onetime followers of the recently dethroned King of the Jews. Unescorted and without defense, they go where they know for certain, that roman guards have been placed to bar their way – not to mention, a stone big enough to sink a fishing boat. And yet, what they meet at this place, where they must have known they'd encounter at least the frightful sight of

what remained from that terrible Friday, must be something truly fearful. And to know that, all we have to do is look to the men who'd been posted as guards at the tomb – for fear of what they and the Marys encountered, those guards “shook and became like dead men.”

All of which is to say, these two women are some of the most stout-hearted Disciples of Christ that we encounter in all of Scripture. Unlike the twelve, or even the so-called men sent to guard the broken body of the Christ, there isn't a cowardly bone in either of their bodies. Which is why they are called to be the world's first evangelists – because they, and they alone, refused to be ruled by fear. So then, what we really have here this morning is what we might call “a failure to communicate.” The women are told, first, not to fear, and then to go, and begin the process of disseminating the Good News of that first Easter morn. At which point they're then assured that Christ will meet His followers in Galilee – “there you will see Him,” they're told. That's the plan – or should I say, that's plan A. But as they say, “Rarely, if ever, does plan A survive first contact with the enemy.” And this particular case is no exception to that adage. As soon as Plan A comes into contact with the enemy, it's time to start exploring Plan B. Because what's required of these two disciples is to move forward in faith – yes, they have “great joy,” and joy is a genuine fruit of God's own Spirit, and certainly a welcomed gift; but joy cannot replace faith. And the true enemy of faith is not doubt, as we often think, but fear. So, when plan A – a plan requiring tremendous faith – comes into contact with the enemy of faith – fear – Plan B is then set in motion. As such, instead of seeing Jesus in Galilee as they were promised; before they can get anywhere near their Apostolic brothers in hiding to deliver the good news, their Resurrected Lord has to make a detour on His own way to Galilee, in order to head

them off at the pass. Where He greets them face-to-face, in the flesh, bearing the very same message and instructions the two women had previously received from His messenger. Beginning just as the angel did, with that first and most important command, "Do not be afraid."

Which is, as we already mentioned, easier said than done. Except, neither the angel of the Lord, or the Lord Himself are speaking about that knee-jerk, reflexive kind of fear, which immediately comes to mind. That sensation you get when you step off the curb without first looking, only to have a car pass you by, going 35 miles an hour - and there's no question of fast it was going...because it was close enough that could read the speedometer. That kind of momentary fear cannot be helped. So, what they're referring to is the kind of systemic fear that effectively prevents us from doing what we need to do, and keeps us from living into what God has created us to be. The kind of fear which can take a dozen, otherwise faithful disciples, and lock them up, away from the very world they have been sent out to help redeem. And even when it comes to that kind of fear, the truth is: we still can't help ourselves. For that kind of fear, there is only one remedy and one help - the faith that is gifted to us by God Himself. So, plan B is really nothing more than God Himself, swinging by on the way to somewhere else, if only to deliver our only hope against any and all such fear, as may prevent us from following Him.

Because, Easter itself, along with the One who is Himself the Resurrection, means this: that death no longer has any power whatsoever over any who follow Christ.

Therefore, among them, literally no one and nothing may be rightly feared. Since what is being asked of all who find their salvation in God, is that they would then go out and find those who have yet to encounter that salvation face-to-face, in the flesh.

And in such a ministry as that, fear is not only of no help, it is our one and only true hinderance. Because many of those we will encounter in that ministry are those for whom fear has become a way of life, as well as those for whom that kind of systemic fear which the faithful cannot afford, is how they actually make their living. Those for whom fear is not even so much a weapon, as an everyday tool. Something to be regularly used as a means to their own ends - as an artist employs a paintbrush. And when it comes to preaching the Gospel to likes of those who are, either, themselves ruled by fear, or hell-bent on ruling others by it, there isn't even the least bit of room for us to bring our own fears into the conversation - and more importantly, as it turns out, there's absolutely no need.

Because this same Easter Gospel, which explicitly tells those who are to follow Christ, "Do not be afraid," likewise has its own message for those who have long ruled by terror, fearfully attempting to oppress God's faithful. Lest we overlook the obvious, it's not only the two Marys who are afraid of the one act of God that literally changes everything. When it comes to the fact of the Resurrection, it's the Roman guards who are the most scared of all; they don't just have fear - fear has them. These oppressors "shook and became like dead men," when God's messenger delivered the joyful news: that death no longer has any dominion over those who belong to Christ. In fact, they became like dead men, because - in light of the Resurrection - that is precisely what they are. And note: no one - not the angel, not these heroically faithful women, and not even Christ Himself - bothers to tell them, "Do not be afraid;" Why? Because the truth of the matter is: that any and all who employ fear to manipulate or oppress their neighbors, now have every reason to be afraid. And from that one morning on, those who lord death over others, are themselves already as good as dead. For on this day,

the Lord has directly and eternally acted - acted against all that they so falsely value, and against the very thing they have long held near to their own hearts, at the dear cost of others. So, all who fear the Lord now have absolutely nothing to fear. While any who do not, have every right to be fearful! But even for them there is still hope, and God has placed that precious hope in you and I. Because as of this morning, it is now our task to fearlessly deliver the message, "that Jesus Christ is risen today, because He is the Lord of all." Meaning: fear is now exactly as useful to us, as Christians; as burial cloths are to our Lord, now that He is risen. So, I'm afraid, to dare to do what we must, means we dare not be afraid.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*