

Jesus had been crucified before their eyes. In the twilight of that Friday, they had tried to prepare his body for burial. Their loving service would have to wait. It was the Sabbath, when no work could be done, not even this. They did what they could, but had to leave his remains in the tomb, with the plan to return as soon as possible.

That’s exactly what they did, in the light of early Sunday dawn, and so we join these faithful women at the tomb, to share with them a shocking joy that lifted them from darkness. What is their joy? Jesus does not lie there lifeless. He doesn’t lie there at all. Not only that; a heavenly messenger, an angel of the Lord, greets them with news of amazing hope. His appearance was like lightning, and his message even more dazzling. This messenger knows what we need most. His word to the women that morning and his word to you on this morning is the same: “Do Not Be Afraid.”

More than anything, it is fear that has scarred us; fear born of sin, fear born of uncertainty, fear born of ignorance, fear born of sickness, fear born of guilt; fear born of losing the things that we have made most important to our hearts. The fears that gripped the women on their way to the tomb of Jesus live in our minds in a thousand forms. And it is fear that disorders the human mind, bringing uneasiness, unhappiness, and sometimes, total despair.

As the disorders afflicting our common life increase in violence, the fears inside us become more and more intense. If ever the words of God’s angelic messenger have been needed, it is today. So, whatever you are carrying with you this Easter—an Easter on which world events, local difficulties and personal problems seem to loom large—please open your ears and open your heart. A messenger of God has stationed himself outside of an empty tomb, and this messenger says to you, “Do not be afraid. Don’t be afraid to live. Don’t be afraid to die. Jesus is alive.”

It is quite possible that you’re thinking. “But I am afraid to live and to die.” If that’s the case, I would gently ask you, “Why?” Are you afraid of sins that have scarred your past? Does the memory of them trouble you today? Do you fear standing before God in the day of judgment? Jesus has risen from the dead. His Father has accepted the payment He made, the payment for all your sins, every last one. Do not be afraid.

Are you fearful of the present moment? Is it the future that is pressing fear into your heart? Today the words of the angel ring out to break the cycle: “Do not be afraid.” The angel makes this statement in front of the vacant tomb of the risen Lord Jesus. His living again validates all His promises, promises such as, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me—and I am with you always.” Promises like, “My sheep hear my voice; I know them; they follow me; I give them eternal life; and they shall never perish.” Promises like those made by his followers, such as Peter, who wrote, “...we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...to an imperishable, undefiled, and unfading inheritance in heaven.” Jesus physically died and physically rose from death, and He

promises that if you put your trust in Him, after your physical death you will someday physically rise when He returns. The question of the day is, if you really believe this, what are you afraid of?

Again, the angel said, “Do not be afraid. I know you **seek** Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; for He has risen as He said.”

The women went to the tomb that morning seeking nothing but a dead body. We can’t blame them for that. They went out of love and respect to finish a heartbreaking task. What they found was not just an empty tomb but a shift in reality. They now lived in a world in which their dead teacher and friend had come back to life; a world in which it was now possible to undo death. And this angel messenger was very kindly trying to help them remember that Jesus had talked about this. “He has risen *as He said*” means resurrection is something Jesus had predicted, and now, it had happened. Not only had Jesus talked about it and predicted it, but He had proven it could be done, first with others, including a little girl, the son of a widow, and his friend Lazarus, and now, He was the raised-to-life-one. His living again validates all his promises. And if He was right about his own resurrection, then He is right about this: “The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.”

Here is the joy of this Easter Sunday—the deep and endless blessing of Jesus’ resurrection for you. Our satanic enemy wants us afraid; wants us panicked; wants us intimidated and distracted. Why? Because he wants us to forget. He wants me and you to forget that Jesus suffered and died to cancel the sins of our past. He wants you to forget that there was no one in that tomb that Sunday morning. He wants you to forget that Jesus came back to life and lives today as the eternal Lord and King. You see why, right? If you forget that; if you overlook those things; if Jesus is not your power source, you are easy to scare and easy to control.

The real message of Easter is this: What you believe about your future determines how you live today. As a believer in Jesus, what can you believe about your future? Jesus has risen *as He said*. That means you will live forever with him *as He said*. Death is not the end of you *as He said*. He is coming back to set all things right *as He said*. You are destined to join Him at His festival table *as He said*. His resurrection validates these future promises as well! Faith in Jesus connects you to a living person; a living person who is God, a living person you can seek and find. He’s alive to meet you at His Table, not just on Easter Sunday, but every time His people come together. He’s alive to speak to you from every page of His Holy Word, whenever you let Him.

Do you seek Jesus, who was crucified? Well, that’s good, because He was—for you—to erase fear of your past sins. And, let this news shock you awake today: Jesus does not remain behind a burial stone. He has risen as He said. Do not be afraid!