

The Message of Comfort

By Vicar Jake Zabel

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, Amen.

Sermon text Matthew 28:1-10

¹After the Sabbath, it was dawning on the first of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. ²And behold, there came a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down out of Heaven and having come rolled away the stone, and was sitting upon it. ³And the appearance of him was lightning and his clothing was white as snow. ⁴And from the fear of him those keeping guard trembled and became like dead men. ⁵And answering, the angel said to the women, "you, do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus the Crucified One. ⁶He is not here, for He is risen as He said. Come, see the place where He lay. ⁷And going quickly, tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and behold He will go before you into Galilee, there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you." ⁸And quickly going out from the sepulchre, with fear and great joy, they ran to tell the message to His disciples. ⁹And as they were going to tell His disciple, behold Jesus met them saying "Grace to you!" And having come to Him they took hold of His feet, and worshipped Him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, "do not be afraid. Go and tell the message to My brethren, so that they go up into Galilee, there they will see Me."

Lord sanctify us by your truth, your Word is truth. Amen.

On the Sixth Day of Creation Week God finished His work and rested on the Seventh Day. So too on the Sixth Day of the Passion Week Jesus cried out "it is finished" (John 19:30) and on the Seventh Day of the week He rested in the tomb; marking the end of the Old Creation.

On the First Day of Creation Week God said "let there be light," and light shone forth, forever separating the light from the darkness. And now on the first day of the Resurrection Week Jesus Christ, the Light of World (John 8:12) has returned from the dead to shine the light and cause the darkness to flee; marking the start of the New Creation.

On Good Friday darkness covered the entire earth as the Light of the World was extinguished. Now on Sunday, the first day of the week, as the sun rose, shining light upon the darkness of night, the Son of God rose from the dead shining the light of God upon the darkness of our fallen world.

As the earth shook at Jesus' death, so now the earth shakes again to mark His resurrection, as an angel from heaven descends upon the tomb. The angel comes and rolls away the stone that blocked the entrance of the tomb, not to let Jesus out but to let us in. "Come and see," said the angel, "see the place where He lay. He is not here, for He is risen just as He said." The tomb was opened so that all could come and see that Christ had risen, to show to the world that Jesus had been resurrected.

And as the angel of the LORD rolled back the stone he shattered the Roman seal which had been placed on the tomb (Matthew 27:66) showing that God's authority conquered man's authority.

As the angel, whose appearance was like that of lightning, descended, the soldiers guarding the tomb fell down in fear. They fainted and became like dead men. These were fearless, battle-hardened men. These men had probably fought in bloodied nightmarish battles, and yet the sight of the angel caused them to collapse in fear, once again showing God's power and authority over the Roman Empire. This is the God who can strike fear into the hearts of men, who can melt the hearts of even the bravest soldiers. Yet this is also the God who brings comfort and care for His flock.

Seeing an angel is a fearful thing. In Luke's Gospel (2:9-10) we hear of the shepherd being greatly afraid when the angel appeared. The shepherds, the first witnesses of the Incarnation, trembled at the sight of the angel and needed to hear the words "do not be afraid." Seeing an angel is a frightful thing and it is understandable that the soldiers collapsed in fear.

As we heard in verse 8 of today's reading the women, the first witnesses of the Resurrection, were also afraid. However, they did not faint, for the angel of the LORD turned to them and said "you, do not be afraid." Most Bibles translate the angel's word as "do not be afraid." However, the original Greek contains an additional "you" in the text, narrowing the direction of the words "do not be afraid" to the ones to whom the angel spoke, the women.

The angel's words bring comfort to the women. Here the angel of the LORD, as the messenger of God, brings the message of comfort, "do not be afraid." The appearance of the angel is not something that needs to be feared, for he comes not to destroy us but to bring us the good news of the resurrection.

The direction of his words is very important. For the angel does not tell the unbelieving soldiers not to fear, instead he lets them faint in fear. The angel turns to the faithful women who had come to serve their dead Lord, and brings to them the comforting words "you, do not be afraid." He directs the promise to "you" the believers. The angel continues by saying "for I know that you seek Jesus the Crucified One." Here the angel provides the reason for why they are not to fear, "do not be afraid, because I know that you seek Jesus." "Do not fear, because I know that you are believers."

When the angel appeared he struck fear into those did not believe in Jesus, but to those who believed he spoke the message of comfort. While the unbelievers fainted, the believers were left to stand so that they could hear the glorious news “He is not here, for He is risen.” This is a foretaste of the Second Coming of Jesus. When Jesus returns in glory, those who have not believed in Him will shudder in fear, while the believers will be comforted with the words “you, do not be afraid.”

We no longer need to fear, for even though Jesus died, He also rose again, conquering death.

Adam was the first man of Creation, and by his sin death came into the world (Romans 5:12, 1 Corinthians 15:21), but by Jesus, the man of the New Creation, came the resurrection of the dead. By His death Christ trampled down death.

All who believe and are baptized will be saved (Mark 16:16), for all who were baptized have been baptized into Christ’s death, and buried with Him (Romans 6:3-4). Those who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ and by faith in Christ Jesus are called sons of God (Galatians 3:26-27). In Baptism we received the Holy Spirit, and all who have received the Spirit of God have been adopted as children of God. And if we have become children of God, then we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, therefore we who have died with Him will also be glorified with Him (Romans 8:15-17). Therefore, we do not need to fear death, for those who believe and are baptized are united with Christ. Thus, even though we die we shall be raised with Him. For Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Him, even though he may die, he shall live (John 11:25).

Therefore, you, do not be afraid.

For Christ is risen. “Come,” says the angel “come and see with your own eyes. He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said.” Three times Jesus predicted His resurrection (Matthew 16:21, 17:23, 20:19). Jesus cannot lie and He promised to rise again. Here is the empty tomb, proof that He is alive. On Good Friday the women watched as Jesus was laid in the tomb (Mark 15:47, Luke 23:55). They saw His lifeless body enter the grave. The soldiers watched it all Saturday. And on Sunday morning the women arrived to see the angel roll away the stone and break the Roman seal. The women saw the body go in and they witnessed the breaking of the seal, evidence that the stone was being rolled away for the first time since Good Friday. Now they entered the tomb and saw it empty. They saw the body go in, but no body came out.

And now that they have seen and believed, the angel of the LORD commissions them to go and proclaim this message to the disciples. The disciples had abandoned Jesus. Peter had denied Him three times. They had sinned against their Lord and friend by leaving Him and turning their backs on Him. These men must have been wallowing in despair and sorrows, mourning the death of Jesus and regretting their own actions. Peter himself, having denied Jesus wept bitterly in sorrow and repentance (Matthew 26:75). In addition to this, the disciples fearing the Jews had locked themselves away (John 20:19). These men were scared, miserable and repentant. They were in need of some comfort. And so the angel commands the women “go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead.” Go and give these men the same comfort that you have received.

As an interesting side note, it is significant to point out that these women were not told to preach to the whole world, just to the disciples. When Jesus later appeared to His disciples, He commissioned them to proclaim the Gospel message to the whole world (Matthew 28:16-20, Mark 16:14-15, Luke 24:46-49, John 20:21, Acts 1:7-8). Though the women were the first witnesses to the Resurrection, and the first to proclaim the Resurrection, they did so only in a private situation and not publicly, further showing that the Scriptures do not promote Women’s Ordination.

And as the women were sent out, the angel ends by saying, “Behold! I have told you.” The angel signs off his signature on this message, so that when people question the women, they can testify that this message which we proclaim is not our own, but it is God’s Word which we have received, given to us by His angel. In verse 8 it says they went to tell the message to the disciples. The Greek word here is *apangelló* (*ἀπαγγέλλω*) which comes from two words *apo* meaning ‘from’ and *angello* which is the verb form of angel which means to ‘tell a message’. The word angel means messenger. These women are being told to *angello*, to tell the message. The LORD sent His angel, His messenger, and now these women are being sent from (*apo*) this messenger (*angelos*). Later, when Jesus speaks to these women He uses the same verb when He tells them to go and tell the message (*apangello*) to my brethren. Just as the Father sent this angel as a messenger, so too Jesus sends these women as His messenger, they go out carrying the Message of the LORD.

And as they go out they leave the sepulchre. Even this is important, because Matthew has used two different Greek words for tomb. When the women arrived He called it a *taphon* (*τάφον*), which comes from the Greek word for ‘bury’ and refers to a burial-site. But when they leave Matthew calls it a *mnemeion* (*μνημεῖον*), which comes from the Greek word for ‘remember’ and refers to a monument, a memorial-site. When the women arrived this place was nothing more than the place where Jesus was buried, but as they leave, they are leaving a standing monument to the resurrection. They are leaving the spot which testifies to the fact that “He is risen.” For there is no greater message of comfort than the empty tomb. There is no greater truth than the fact that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Paul taught that if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and our faith is empty. If Christ did not rise from the dead then our faith is futile and

Christians are foremost to be pitied. For if Christ is not risen then we are still trapped in sin (1 Corinthians 15:14,17,19). For if Jesus died and did not rise again, then He was nothing more than an ordinary man, and our salvation was not won.

But since Jesus did rise of the dead, He triumphed over sin, He conquered death, He defeated the Devil, He won for us our salvation, He redeemed us from our sins, He justified us before God, and just as He assuredly rose, so too we, with certainty, will be resurrected also. To live is to Christ and to die is gain (Philippians 1:21). We have comfort in the resurrection, we need not fear death, for even though we die, we shall be raised again and glorified alongside Christ.

When Jesus appeared to the women on their way, He comforted them and told them not to fear. Then He told them, “go and tell my brothers”. Before the resurrection Jesus called His disciples “friends” (John 15:15). But now that He has been raised from the dead, He calls us His brethren. By Christ’s resurrection we have been justified (Romans 4:25) and made children of God (Rom 8:14-17, 1 John 3:2, Gal 3:26-29). We have been adopted into God’s family and become brothers, and sisters, of Jesus. Thus we have become heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, so that just as we suffer and die with Him, we shall be raised and glorified with Him. For this reason, I do not consider the sufferings of this present time to be worth considering, when compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us. (Romans 8:18)

And so Jesus comes to the women. He meets them on their way and brings them comfort. This is our God, who comes to us, and finds us where we are. Just like the women looking for Jesus, we cannot find God. We can’t come to Him, we can’t choose Him or make a decision for Him. We can’t seek Him, as Paul says, “no one seeks God.” (Romans 3:11) We can’t find God or come to Him, so He comes and finds us. He brings us the message to us. Through the Word read and preached in the liturgy, readings and sermon, and through the physical Word received in Baptism and Holy Communion, Jesus comes to us. He brings us the message of comfort. He brings us salvation. He brings us eternal life.

And having received His Word, having been given His grace, He now calls us to go and tell this message. Go and proclaim this message of comfort, that Jesus Christ is risen.

Everyone of us, has the right and the responsibility to go out and proclaim the resurrection.

You don’t need to be a pastor or a missionary to tell people about our resurrected Lord. Scripture clearly states that women can’t be pastors (1 Cor. 14:33-35, 1 Timothy 2:11-14, 3:2, Tit. 1:6), yet, the first witnesses to the resurrection were women, they were commanded and permitted to proclaim the good news of the resurrection.

Every Christian, pastor or layman or women, old or young, has the command and the freedom to go and tell the message of comfort, that Jesus is risen.

Therefore, do not be afraid, go and tell the message that HE IS RISEN!

Amen.

May our Resurrected Lord, Jesus Christ, strengthen and preserve you in all that you say and do, now and forever. Amen.