

Fear and Great Joy

Matthew 28:1-10 (v. 8)

Introduction

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia! I love the Easter response. “Alleluia” is the Latin transliteration of the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew “Hallelu-yah”, which simply means “praise the Lord.” “Alleluia” and “Hallelujah” are interchangeable, but in Christian liturgy we use “Alleluia.” Around the ninth century, “alleluia” began to be suppressed or omitted from Christian worship during Lent, to emphasize the penitential nature of the season. So, when we start saying it again, it just makes worship seem so much more joyful. The sadness and sorrow of the Passion and the cross are replaced with the joy of the Resurrection light.

Mary’s Fear Is Real

The two Marys’ fear is real. Their Friend, their Lord, who had promised eternal life (**John 3:16**), had been killed. How could He keep His promise if He is dead? How can the dead give life? When they got to the tomb, there was a great earthquake as an angel of the Lord rolled back the stone from in front of it. The big, brave Roman soldiers fainted with fear. This is frightening for the women, but that fear is also compounded with the fear of death they still have. That is the great enemy of human beings. Some like to say that death is the natural end of life. If that is so, why is the fear of death common to most people? God did not create death. He created life. Death was the punishment for sin. God said concerning the forbidden fruit, “*On the day you eat of it you shall surely die*” (**Genesis 2:17**). That’s why Paul says in **1 Corinthians 15: The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law (1 Corinthians 15:56)**. Humanity fears death because deep down we know it’s the punishment for sin.

The Joy Is Real

But the women’s joy is just as real. Now, they have been told by the angel that Jesus is alive. Not only are they relieved that their Friend, their Lord, was alive, He could keep His promise. He has conquered death, so He *can* give life. The One who had forgiven their sins will give them eternal life. That same joy is ours. Through His death, He has forgiven our sins. His resurrection is the Father’s seal of approval of His crucifixion, and we have life because of it (Read **Romans 6:5-11**).

Fear and Joy, the Moment of Discovery

But how can *fear and great joy (v. 8)* exist in us at the same time? Even though the angel had told them Jesus was risen, they still didn’t have any evidence but his word. There is that moment in life, that moment of discovery, that *aha* moment when, all of a sudden, something goes right. But then you think, *is this real? Maybe I’m just dreaming or hallucinating. This is too good to be true. These kinds of things just don’t happen, especially to me.* And the fear remains. But they didn’t give into the fear. They *ran to tell the disciples (v. 8)*, to give them the angel’s message. This was an act of faith. Faith is not having no fear, but doing what is right in the face of fear.

Then Came Jesus

But then, something happened that put all their fears to rest. Jesus met them! Jesus appeared to them and gave them the visual assurance they needed to exorcise the fear from their lives. Their fear turned to worship as they fell at His feet. Jesus cast out their fear and repeated the angel's message, *"Don't be afraid; go and tell My brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me"* (v. 10).

Christians Are not Immune to Fear

The same thing happens to us. Christians aren't immune to fear. Fear is the product of doubt. Sometimes, the devil throws things at us in life that are too hard to handle, and they cause us to doubt. We still believe, but there is a nagging fear in the back of our minds, thanks to our fallen nature. And that's when we need to see Christ.

The Risen Christ Brings Joy to Our Fear

Today, He comes to us, just like He did to the two Marys. He's come to us in the Word, and He comes to us in the bread and wine of Holy Communion. As we feast on the body and blood of our crucified, risen Lord, He forgives our sins, strengthens our faith, and fills us with the resurrection joy as He says to us, "Don't be afraid; go and tell others about Me and My saving love."

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
