

Jesus' Resurrection

Purpose

To experience the “fear and excitement” of Resurrection.

Hearing the Word

The Scripture for this lesson is printed below.

Matthew 28:1-10 (NIV)

1 After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

2 There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.

3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow.

4 The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

5 The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified.

6 He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.

7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.”

8 So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

9 Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him.

10 Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

Matthew 28:1-10 (KJV)

1 In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.

2 And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.

3 His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow:

4 And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.

5 And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.

6 He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

7 And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.

8 And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word.

9 And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.

10 Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

DAILY BIBLE STUDY

April 6	Psalms 118:1-9, 14-18
April 7	Matthew 27:57-61
April 8	Matthew 27:62-66
April 9	Matthew 28:1-10
April 10	Matthew 28:11-15
April 11	John 20:19-23
April 12	Revelation 1:13-18

Seeing the Need

Candy, baskets, new clothes, a great meal, and hymns of triumph and celebration. Did I hear trumpets playing? I should, because today is a day unlike any other in our year. It is Resurrection Day!

One year when our family was living in South Carolina on an Air Force base, the Easter sunrise service was held on the tarmac where the planes landed and were kept. Parents brought their bleary-eyed children out into the dewy, almost chilly early spring pre-dawn; and we all stumbled our way across the grass and found our way to the cold folding chairs. No lights were lit. Only darkness.

After what seemed to be an awfully long wait, as we looked east, we saw the sun come up over the horizon. Nothing stood in the way of the sunrise, but soon

we realized that a large object had been placed before us. As the sun continued to break through and light the new morning, everyone's eyes opened wide. Gasps rippled through the congregation. In front of us, life-sized and covered with lilies, vines, and everything beautiful was an empty cross.

Nine years old at the time, I don't remember a thing the chaplain said, nor any part of the service, but I will never forget the incredible sight of the cross at sunrise on Easter morning. It spoke to me, and still does, more deeply than words, filling me not so much with fear but with excitement and awe. This is what the angels proclaimed. This is what God promised.

Resurrection is something we can claim and experience in our own lives, especially on this first day of the week. As you reread the Scripture of this miraculous morning, my hope is that you will once again experience this for your life and find the joy of this day in the company of Christian brothers and sisters. Let's celebrate!

Nothing New

Cheri is a women's health nurse practitioner, and she sees dozens of expectant mothers each year. She is amazed at how many couples seem to believe that the child to be born to them will be unlike any other and that no family in history has or will experience what they are experiencing. Not to mention, the child will be the most handsome or beautiful and most talented and intelligent—far above average! When she tells me that, we just smile, because we know that our two sons were the most hand-

some and intelligent and talented children ever created.

Even though humans have the ability and desire to believe that our lives are singularly unique and our experiences are unlike any one else's (the truest love, the most important work, the best grandchildren), when we stop and think for a moment or two, it's humbling to realize that there is nothing new. Granted, there are still things that are special and dramatic, and they catch our eye and attention; but in terms of "totally new," we are varieties of the same theme, the same human joys and sadness and successes and tragedies. Yes, in one sense, we are all unique, but we are all unique together.

Today's Scripture holds the unique story upon which we Christians build our faith, God's miraculous act on Easter morning. Resurrection means "raising from the dead." It comes from the Latin *resurgere*, to "resurge" or "to rise." We know of other instances in Scripture when persons were brought back to life, including by Jesus' hands.

Lazarus is perhaps the most well-known case, as Jesus called him back to life from the tomb. Many Bible scholars say that Lazarus was resuscitated, brought back to life by Jesus' act, whereas Jesus was raised to life as a new creation. In doing so, he opened the gates for each of us to experience life that is eternal in nature (2 Corinthians 5:17).

When Lazarus was brought back to life, he eventually died again. When Jesus was resurrected, he was then raised to heaven and lives now eternally at God's right hand. Jesus is the one who has brought not simply a more

abundant life but also eternal life for you and me.

What difference does it make that Jesus has been resurrected by God's power and lives today?

Fear

As a staff member of the Dakotas Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church and serving as a superintendent for 19 years, I have managed to wear out four and a half cars with all the driving I've had to do. With nearly 145,000 square miles in the two states, my tires have become acquainted with plenty of interstates, highways, and little back roads. In all these years, I have never had an accident nor hit a deer, moose, or other such animal, although I have had to replace a few windshields due to rocks and the occasional pheasant.

One thing I have decided is that I hate to drive long distances after dark. In fact, I have prayed when I've had to drive at night that God would protect the sweet creatures that roam at night and keep them in the ditches or the fields or the forests rather than on the roads. I believe in prayer. I also believe in prayer when filled with fear. Besides breaking my car, it would also break my heart to hit and hurt one of those beautiful creatures.

As we noted in an earlier lesson, fear is always based on a future event. What may happen is what seizes us. Fear is also based on the pure unknown. When we come up against something so strange that we have never before known about or experienced, fear is a totally legitimate emotion.

In today's Scripture, it's not a matter

of deer in the headlights but instead a matter of experiencing the power of God in a way never seen before. Following Jesus' death and burial, Pilate and the chief priests posted guards at Jesus' tomb (Matthew 27:62-66), which already had "a large stone" at its door (verse 60). They further secured the entrance to the tomb by "sealing the stone" (verse 66), almost, it seems, to make sure Jesus stayed dead. But God was involved. A little something like a boulder was no match for the incomparable power of God.

"There was a great earthquake," Matthew tells us, and "an angel from the Lord came down from heaven. Coming to the stone, he rolled it away and sat on it" (Matthew 28:2-3). It was almost as if God were saying, "This is all you have?" With a glimpse into the glory of God, the angel's shining face and clothes dropped the guards of the tomb into terror and left them shaking and acting like dead men. Quite a sight and quite an experience! I imagine I'd be right there with them, shaking, quaking, and dropping at the vision of such a holy, powerful moment.

Isn't it interesting that the first witnesses to Jesus' resurrection were Roman guards? Neither these important soldiers--instilled with the power of Rome and with official authority to maintain order--nor a closed and sealed tomb were any match for the power of God. In the face of God's might and glory, all of the human, puffed-up, and oh-so-very-important actions of Rome were set aside, as though they were of no consequence at all. All that was left was for the soldiers to experience fear in the face of holiness, as their work came

to a sudden end.

However, it's more than opening a tomb that can elicit fear. "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the tomb," Matthew says (verse 1). Instead of encountering what they thought they would see, they also witnessed God's power and glory, as well as the terrified guards. They also had a conversation of sorts with an angel, certainly not your typical Sunday morning activity.

The angel must have known what his appearance looked like, because his first words were words of good news: "Don't be afraid" (verse 5). It's okay, he reassured them. You are looking for a dead body? He's not here, because he has been raised by the very hand of God to new life! He'll meet you in Galilee. You can meet him there.

How might we have responded to meeting an angel and hearing such incredible, remarkable, almost unbelievable words? I'd be scared, even if the angel told me not to be! The women experienced great fear for all of the right reasons that morning; but as we will see, that wasn't the last thing they experienced, was it?

As you place yourself into this Gospel story, what might your first reaction have been?

Excitement

Like me, you've probably experienced times when fear and excitement ran hand in hand before you. Perhaps it felt as if your heart leaped out of your throat, and you were so happy and so terrified at the same time.

I remember the first time I held

Cheri's hand as we walked in the snow behind her parents' farmhouse. I remember each time we discovered we were going to be parents. The fear and the excitement of those events and others were so closely matched together, almost like breathing out and breathing in. The exhale was the fear, the inhale was the excitement, as I was filled with hope and expectation and still had to gasp a little at being uncertain about this future that came crashing down on me.

Verse 8 of today's Scripture seems to capture that feeling: "With great fear and excitement, they hurried away from the tomb and ran to tell his disciples." The women were overwhelmed by what the news might mean, but at the same time, they were filled with incredible energy and the power to "summon forth" or "call out," which is the original meaning of excite. They almost couldn't stop themselves, because they were excited to tell the disciples what they had heard!

Isn't that the case with you? When you have heard or experienced something amazing or life-changing, don't you quickly call someone or maybe take a picture on your phone and then text it to all of your friends?

You may remember, like me, waking up in the middle of the night as a child. The shadows seemed to be active, and the house creaked, and our first instinct was to run to those persons who could help take the fear away. It was something to get rid of, and we found that relief in the arms of someone bigger and safer than the danger of the night. The fear that claims us is best shared with others who have the power to remove it from behind our hearts, where it seems

to sit.

Excitement, though, is so far different, which makes it amazing that the women would have felt both emotions so close together. When we are excited, we will talk with a server in the restaurant or a stranger in line or almost anyone, not to take the excitement away, but in a strange way, to grow the excitement by having others join us in joy. The women hurried with excitement, because they couldn't wait to tell the disciples! We consider the women to be the first evangelists of the Christian faith, because hearing the incredible news, their only goal was to share it with others.

They were stopped for a moment, though. They were stopped by an even greater moment, as they encountered the risen Jesus, who greeted them on Resurrection morning. All the women could do was grab his feet and worship him. Jesus' response was just what they needed: "Don't be afraid. Go and tell my brothers that I am going into Galilee. They will see me there" (verse 10).

Imagine the meeting between the women and the disciples, their emotions ranging from disbelief to fear to excitement. The news changed their entire world. Joy replaced sadness, and excitement overwhelmed the fear they faced when Jesus was crucified.

What is your reaction this Resurrection morning? The ancient greeting for this day that we still repeat is "Christ is risen!" thus announcing the good news and sharing the excitement. And the response is, "He is risen indeed!" affirming this life-altering, world-changing news.

At least one dictionary records over

125 languages and cultures that offer this greeting on Easter. All of them use exclamation points. These words bring the power of the Resurrection into our midst: Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! That's not something to shrug off!

May we offer that greeting today with joyful voices, calling out the power of God's grace and love by offering the affirmation of the Risen Christ in our midst. Easter should change us, and not only for the day, or because we wear a new dress or shirt. Easter has the ability to transform us from living day-to-day

with a component of fear to becoming persons who are filled with God's Spirit, excited for the present life and the eternal life ahead. Thanks be to God and the risen Christ!

Who needs to hear from you, with affirmation and joy, that Christ is risen indeed?

God of resurrection, fill my heart with the promise and proof of your Son in my life, and show me the opportunities I have to give the gift of Jesus to another today; in Jesus' name. Amen.