

**Christ Has Risen!**  
**Sermon on Matthew 28:1-10**  
**Saint Mark's, Watertown, WI**  
**Pastor Karl Walther**  
**April 16, 2006**

**Introduction: What Do You Fear?**

*Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O grave, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God: He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! Hallelujah! and Amen!*

Dear fellow celebrants of the Resurrection of our Lord:

On this Easter Festival morning, I need to begin with a question for you. It's actually a sort of a personal question. And the question is: What makes you most afraid?

What makes you most afraid...? We don't even like answering the question, do we? We're even sort of liable to say, "Nothing! Nothing makes me afraid!"

But that's not true, is it? Do you know there are some five hundred fifty phobias, some five hundred fifty specifically identified fears that people have? But really they apply to a smallish minority of people—five or ten percent.

I'm talking more about the big fears. Some weeks ago, I heard a short list of people's most common fears. I wasn't able to verify it on that most true of instruments – the internet! – but the list did make sense to me. In third place: people fear surgery. It makes sense, doesn't it? In second place: people fear public speaking. I can understand that. And in first place?

In first place: people fear ... death. And why not? First, we fear the uncertainty of when we will undergo death. Then, we fear the pain associated with death. And then, we fear the uncertainty of exactly what comes after death. I mean: not a single one of us has died and come back with a nice and certain story to tell about it. And one more fear: we have this gnawing sense that death is a time of reckoning, and we have a very real concern as to how that will turn out, given our guilty lives....

So, how do you deal with fear like that? Well, usually we ignore it, right? If we don't think about it, it must not be there! But sometimes, in front of a very present threat, we have to deal with our fear. And then, more often than not, we try to run away from it. But as you know, and as experts agree, the best way to handle fear is to own up to it and to conquer it.

It's got to be that way with our fear of death—a universal fear that every human being has to share. We can ignore death only so long—seventy or eighty years, if we're fortunate. We can't run away from it; every person has to undergo death. We've got to handle death by owning up to it, and we have to find a way to overcome it.

That is what Easter is about! In the Easter Gospel message, we encounter – face to face – him who enables us to face down death.

**Exposition: Account of Christ's Resurrection**

It was an early April morning: probably clear, probably chilly, nineteen and three quarters' centuries ago. It was just after six AM: the very beginning of another work week for the Jews, but also a part of a festival vacation week for the people. It's halfway across the world: in southern Israel, in small and crowded, but also sleepy Jerusalem.

A couple of women were making their way quietly together through the narrow and winding streets of the city. We know from other accounts that they wanted more thoroughly to honor the dead body of their friend, Jesus. And they were bringing burial spices for that purpose.

But we find out here that the women also wanted to observe the grave—to contemplate Jesus’ death, and undoubtedly to reckon with their own. **After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.** And as they walked through the freshly opened northwest gate of the city, as they made their way the short distance to the freshly excavated cave where Jesus was laid in death, they might have been saying, “What a tragedy.... Who’d have thought that Jesus would die so young—and as if he were a criminal. I really thought he’d never die. I really believed he was the Messiah. And if a faultless man like Jesus had to die, then what about us? We’ll die, too. And then, what about us?—given our sins and all....”

Boom!!! Suddenly: **There was a violent earthquake.** And it had to have lasted awhile, as earthquakes do. And the ground was shaking. And the ladies, too. And they struggled to stay upright. And then, they probably fell to their hands and knees. And it lasted longer. And they must have thought, “Oh, no! Are we now going to die!”

But just as suddenly, it stopped. **For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone – and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning—**which flashes with otherworldly brilliance, which flashes with sudden uncertainty. **And his clothes were white as snow—**otherworldly white, holy white, alarmingly white.

Now, as for *the guards*, the Roman guards, the ones placed at the tomb by the Jewish leaders, so that Jesus’ disciples couldn’t possibly have stolen away his body and said that he had risen: **The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.** Can you imagine the terror that filled their hearts? They trembled, and fell to the ground, and curled up, and hid their heads, because of the embarrassment of their sinfulness, and the impending judgment of doom they felt crashing upon their hearts. And you and I know the feeling, because we have felt it, too.

And the women felt it, although they didn’t fall as though dead. Instead: **The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid,** although Jesus had died. *Do not be afraid*, of anything! ever! **For I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen.** Oh my! Could it really be?! Yes!!! And here’s proof: It’s **just as he said** he would. And here’s more proof: **Come and see the place where he lay.** And more proof will be supplied: **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."**

Whew!!! So, what would you have done? Well: **The women hurried away from the tomb, afraid –** after all: a holy angel had spoken to them! – **yet filled with joy –** maybe, could it be?! Jesus was alive!!! – **and ran to tell his disciples.**

And then, and then!!!! **Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said.** No! *Grace to you!* he said. *Rejoice!!!* he said. Now that’s better translated....

And their reaction? **They came to him—**no fear anymore! They **clasped his feet**—they never wanted to fail to trust in him again! And they **worshiped him** as God!

**Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid.** That must be the main message, eh? These were the first words out of the angel’s mouth. These were nearly the first words out of Jesus’ mouth. *Do not be afraid* of anything! ever!

And Jesus’ assignment to the women was the same as the angel had expressed, as well: **Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."**

## **Conclusion: You Have Nothing to Fear!**

So, my brothers and sisters, this account – God’s true Word to us on Easter morning – it begs us to wrestle with the question: What makes you most afraid? ...Like many others, are you afraid of surgery? Like many others, are you afraid of public

speaking? Is it your future that makes you afraid, because you just don't know what is to come for you? Or: is it your past that makes you afraid, because you know so very well what you have done? Is it an enemy who makes you afraid? or a friend that may no longer be a friend? or the loneliness you face without either one?

Is it death? Is it death, understandably, that most makes you afraid?

*Don't be afraid!* That is the message of Easter! *Don't be afraid!* That is Jesus' own interpretation of his resurrection! *Don't be afraid!* of anything! ever!

"*Don't be afraid* of death," says Jesus. "I myself have undergone death. And I beat death. I died; I rose. I beat death for you. I promise to raise you from death. And I have the power, and I have the love for you to do it for you. *Don't be afraid* of death!"

"*Don't be afraid* of your sins," says Jesus. "Yes, they are a stench; they are damnable. Yes, my Father hates them; in fact, my Father must hate and punish the perpetrators of them. But your sin? What sin? I suffered the punishment for your sin! I died for your sin! I buried your sin! I rose and left your sin behind! You don't have sin any more—not to God, not as far as I'm concerned. *Don't be afraid* of sin!"

"*Don't be afraid* of sickness or surgery," says Jesus. "Either you will recuperate, and you will serve me. Or you will die, and you will dwell with me. Or you will struggle, and the power of my life's story will be made evident in your life's story. *Don't be afraid* of sickness or surgery."

"*Don't be afraid* of friends or enemies," says Jesus. "Your friends? Either they will remain your friends forever, through faith in Jesus Christ, or: your better Friend, your perfect Friend – who loves you with an eternal love – he will sustain you without them. Your enemies? Either the dear Lord will use your life and use your testimony to convert them into eternal friends, through faith in Jesus Christ, or: the dear Lord will reckon with their unbelief. So, *Don't be afraid* of friends or enemies!"

And even that little public speaking thing... "*Don't be afraid* of public speaking," says Jesus. "And especially: Don't be afraid to speak this message. Did I not say: *Go and tell my brothers ... ?* So, you: *Go and tell my brothers* – and maybe they're your brothers and sisters, or sons and daughters, or friends and classmates, or coworkers and neighbors. *Go and tell my brothers* this simple Easter message: 'You have two problems: sin and death. In all the world, only Jesus took care of the sin of your soul; he died for it. In all the world, only Jesus takes care of the death of your body; he rose from the dead, and he promises: "*Because I live, you also shall live.*" Sin and death? He beat them for you! Believe it!' *Don't be afraid* to proclaim that simple message to others, who need it just as desperately as you do."

Dearest friends, whom I love with all my heart this Easter Sunday morning: Christ has risen! Our Savior most assuredly lives forever, in order to benefit us. Don't be afraid—ever! Go and tell others—always! Amen!

*Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.* Hallelujah! and Amen!