

My apologies for being gone last Sunday. Since 1981, I have never had a sick day from worship. There were times when I was running a temperature, there had been blizzards and storms, Judy gave birth on a Friday, on a Saturday I broke a vertebrae, both knees and a wrist, but Sunday morning I always preached. So the idea of not being here for EASTER was just not imaginable. But during the Sunrise service last week, I recognized my cold was so severe I could not formulate a coherent sentence. Recognizing everything was planned and prepared for Easter... Diane was prepared to preach, I went home to bed. Yet Pastor Diane suggested that I save that sermon and preach it this week. So I sort of rolled that sermon into this.

I have been getting in touch with FEAR, that no matter how many crises and maladies we survive, regardless of how many times we beat Cancer into remission. We are Creaturely, we Die. We survived the most Severe Pandemic the world has ever known, yet now good friends, leaders who have carried this congregation through hard times: died. At times it feels like CANCER WINS, DEATH WINS. JESUS was dead, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Jewish Sabbath was over... this was Dawn of the First Day of Resurrection...

However, some amazing things have ALSO been taking place, we have had a number of persons who had been in debilitating pain, enough pain to want to give up, who have been released of pain and suffering! Recently an Oscar winning Actress was in a very public law suit over a skiing accident, where the other party ran into her then sued her for \$400,000, while the Actress went on record countersuing for only \$1. The case was decided unanimously against the one bringing suit, but the Actress who had endured all of this left the Courtroom stopped to wish the man well.

The reported cause for the War between Ukraine and Russia, has been that the President of Russia was afraid Ukraine and other Nations of the former USSR would join the NATO Alliance. Last week, because of the war in Ukraine, the Nation of Finland also chose to join the NATO Alliance. And the President of Ukraine has stated that all conflict could cease, if Russia simply stopped their attacks.

Mary Magdalene and Mary (the mother of James and John) were drawn to the Tomb. We all have done the same for loved ones. Jesus had gone to Lazarus' Tomb. We go to weep. We go to mourn. We relive memories. We speak truths we had never dared to speak, trying to find resolution. We expect nothing. We question their own and our personal Resurrection. Sounds of Silence. Darkness before dawn. When suddenly there was a violent earthquake! An angel of the LORD, came down like lightning, his robes white as snow, the Stone sealing the tomb was rolled away. The guards outside the tomb so afraid they became like dead men. Jesus' Resurrection is more than about raising the dead, as happened with Lazarus.

When Jesus was Born, the insurmountable gulf separating Heaven and Earth was crossed.

At his Baptism, Heaven OPENED and GOD was on the Loose!

At the Resurrection, FEAR was defeated! DEATH was made impotent!

ALL the LIVING and the Dead were redeemed, to be with GOD! EVIL and HATE became meaningless, no longer possessing power! That is a new GENESIS, a new CREATION!

Easter is not about Personal Righteousness for Salvation. Jesus died for the sins of the World.

Everyone is free from their past, a clean slate. GOD resurrected Jesus, beating death, beating Sin.

The Resurrection of the Savior was not the same circumstance as had ever happened before.

On the first day of CREATION in Genesis, the earth was "tohu wa vohu" "a Waste and a Void," darkness covered the Deep. Chaos is a lack of hard reality, the darkness of a Nightmare before God began to Create. On this Day of Resurrection, the First Day of the 2nd Creation, it was dark, quiet, lifeless, so controlled as to be under guard; when suddenly the earth shook, there was an angel, there was Light, and there was CREATED: Freedom from FEAR and DEATH and EVIL!

527 times throughout the Bible, more than any other command, we are told to "BE NOT AFRAID." For those wanting to be exact: 302 times to "FEAR NOT;" 66 occasions "DO NOT FEAR;" which gives you something close to 365. 99 times we are commanded "BE NOT DISMAYED;" 33 times "DO NOT BE AFRAID;" 24 times "DO NOT WORRY;" and once or twice each saying "BE ANXIOUS FOR NOTHING;" "I WILL NOT BE AFRAID," "I WILL NOT FEAR."

In Matthew's Easter's description of the Resurrection, the command is slightly nuanced: BE NOT AFRAID, (But) GO TELL HIS DISCIPLES, HE HAS RISEN AND IS GOING AHEAD OF YOU INTO GALILEE." Which when they run into Jesus, Jesus repeats to the first ones to witness the resurrection: "DO NOT BE AFRAID. GO AND TELL MY BROTHERS TO GO TO GALILEE, THERE THEY WILL SEE ME." The point of Easter, is that it is not enough to "BE NOT AFRAID," we are required to Act, to serve as witnesses out in the world.

So where is Galilee, where are they to go?

Jerusalem had since the time of King David been the Royal City, with Solomon the Holy City. GALILEE of the GENTILES is indication of all that territory outside, the ends of the Earth.

Many of you have been doing exactly this, which I hope we will expand upon. You have been talking with neighbors, going forth from this place to Michigan and Minnesota, Washington and Connecticut, or across the wall to invite others to worship GOD with you, to share a faith that is real and is not afraid.

Last week someone sent me a story that moved me. A young boy about nine or ten pulled on his coat and hat, telling his parents he was ready to go, as he had written handbills he wanted to give out to people. Mother and Father each were occupied and it was raining outside, so they tried to dissuade the child. But he was so determined, his father told him to be very careful, to not go too far, to go alone and not be afraid. Over the next two hours in the cold and rain, the child passed out two hundred handbills, until he was drenched and had only one left. He saw a house that looked very dark, so went up to the door and rang the bell. There was no answer, so he rang the bell again. Still nothing. Something told him to not give up, so he began knocking very persistently. Finally, he heard someone coming, and a woman unlocked the door to let him in. The child told her, he was sorry to disturb her, but he had written something for her and handed it to her, then the boy turned away and ran home. The woman looked at the wet piece of paper, on which was written: "GOD Loves you! You are not alone."

The next day, the woman went to church for the first time. The pastor asked if anyone had a Joy or Concern. From the last pew a stranger slowly stood up. She said, "I am not a member of this church, I have never been here before; up until yesterday I would not have said I believed in God. My husband died a while back, then all my friends, until I had no one left. I had poured a glass and had emptied a bottle of pills into my hand to swallow, when there was a knock at the door. No one ever comes at my door, no one ever visits, but the knock sounded as if it were important, something was wrong, someone was afraid, so I went to the door, and there was this little drenched child, who told me I was not alone and God loved me. I thought about that for a long time, then I poured out the glass and threw those pills away, I was no longer afraid and did not need them, and I came here to thank God and this child of God for Resurrection."

Even after Jesus had suffered for ALL the Sins of the world, after GOD had raised Jesus from the dead, after the Women had seen an Angel, after Peter and John had found Jesus was not in the Tomb, STILL the Disciples were AFRAID, locked away in the Upper Room. And Jesus appeared to them. No one asked him how he felt? No one greeted him, as he had greeted the Women saying "Hail!" They were so filled with fear, Jesus own disciples who had lived with him three years, did not even recognize Jesus.

In my office, I have a large Lithograph, that portrays a Pastor holding all the resources of a Church, and next to him stands Jesus still wearing the crown of thorns, barely wrapped in a sheet round his waist.

More often than not over the years, I have had visitors who have questioned, So I recognize the Pastor, but who is the homeless person, who is the Bum? Each time, like Jesus with Thomas and the others, I have asked do you see the holes in his hands and in his feet, and the wound in his side? Does that sound like someone you would recognize, and after a pause there is often a question "Is that stranger Jesus?"

BE NOT AFRAID, ACT ON WHAT YOU BELIEVE!