

*“They were afraid you know.”* This is how it actually reads in the Greek. This is how St. Mark ends his Easter account. *“And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid you know, (as you would be too).”* These last words are implied.

Fear, phobia. Do a Google search and you will see every phobia from A to Z. What fear has seized these women? Claustrophobia? The fear of small, enclosed spaces? Jesus’ tomb is such a place. Maybe this explains their fear. Or angelophobia, the fear of angels. Perhaps necrophobia, the fear of death. Except that the angel says to the women that Jesus is alive.

Some fears simply cannot be explained. Like with the shepherds outside Bethlehem on Christmas Eve. They were *“sore afraid,”* it says. And like Jesus’ disciples on the Sea of Galilee after He stilled the storm. It makes sense to be afraid in the midst of the storm, but they are *“filled with great fear,”* it says, after *“the wind had ceased, and there was a great calm.”* How do we explain that fear?

It’s really quite similar to the fear of these women. The harsh winds of Good Friday have ceased, and there is a great calm, for Jesus *“has risen,”* says the angel. But only now, and not before, does fear seize them.

We could understand these women having fear had they found the dead body of Jesus. That would be reason to be afraid, for that would mean that we have no hope, that our faith in Jesus is all in vain as St. Paul puts it in First Corinthians. But His body is not there. He has risen, and all of this is what seizes the women with fear.

In Scripture, fear is sometimes the response to the mighty acts of God. Such as the shepherds with Jesus’ birth. Such as the disciples after He calmed the great storm. And here with the women after His resurrection. When God steps in and intervenes in our lives, in great and mighty ways, trembling and astonishment, and even fear, are quite often how we respond.

But not you, right? You did not come here to church this morning in trembling fear. But let me ask you this: where are your spices? You don’t have any. You did not come here with spices, like the women, to anoint the dead body of Jesus. This isn’t your first Easter. You’ve seen it all before. You know well the Easter account. And so, when the message of the Risen Christ greeted you this morning, you did not, like the women, flee out of here with trembling and astonishment, being seized with fear. But St. Mark says you would have had you been with the women. *“They were afraid you know, as you would be too!”* he writes.

Maybe it’s time for us to have some fear, to tremble a bit and be astonished. Because if we can walk into the House of God as if it’s no big deal, if we can hear the message of the Risen Lord Jesus and sing Easter hymns, and then come up here to Galilee where the Risen Christ meets us in bread and wine, and not be affected in some way – fear, trembling, astonishment, something, what does that say about us?

Let’s take a look at Simon Peter. The angel tells the women to *“go, tell (Jesus’) disciples and Peter, that He is going before you to Galilee.”* Doesn’t that seem a bit redundant? *“Tell His disciples and Peter”?* Peter is a disciple. So, why the extra emphasis, *“And Peter”?*

Because Peter was deeply grieved by his sin of denial. Three times he had denied Jesus. And then he went out and wept bitterly. And the next thing he hears is that Jesus is dead.

There is a man who trembled, not just with fear, but with every emotion he had. Peter was a mess. And what he needed most was forgiveness. And so, the angel tells the women, "*Tell Peter.*" Tell him what? Not just that Jesus has risen. Tell Peter that Jesus is going to Galilee, and there Peter and the disciples will see Him. It is in Galilee where Jesus restores Peter. In Galilee Jesus says to him, "*Feed My sheep.*" Peter needs to go to Galilee for his fears to be silenced.

If you and I have no fear whatsoever, no trembling, nothing, over the fact that we are poor, miserable sinners, what does this say about us? Like Peter, we have sinned grievously. And because you and I are baptized Christians, it should grieve us that, daily, we rebel against our gracious Lord.

But listen to this, I truly hope that you are here this morning not simply because it is Easter, but because it's Sunday. And on Sundays we go to Galilee to meet Jesus. This is not the empty tomb. "*He is not here,*" said the angel, not in the empty tomb. But because this is Galilee, Jesus is here.

And He is here not to scold you, or worse, to condemn you. And maybe that's why some people have ecclesiophobia, the fear of church. All they hear in their church is how they had better shape up. But that is not why you come here to Galilee. You are here today, and every Sunday, because the Risen Lord Jesus is here to forgive you as He forgave Peter, to restore you as He restored Peter, to assure you that everything is okay. God, your God, is at peace with you. He is not angry at you. The nail marks are still there in Jesus' hands and feet. He was crucified for you, and He is and remains the Crucified One, the One who suffers the penalty you and I deserve. And so, He forgives you. God forgives you. Every one of you He forgives.

And unless you are a block of stone, this mighty and gracious work of God will affect you. Faith in the Crucified and Risen Lord Jesus cannot just sit within our hearts like a lump and do nothing. That's not faith. Faith is active, it does something. Maybe it causes trembling and astonishment. Maybe even fear like with the women.

Yes, they had fear. And so, don't think that you have lost your faith if you have fear, if you have some trembling, if you like Peter, and like the women, are a mess.

It's okay, because the Risen Lord Jesus comes to people, yes sinners, who are a mess, who have messed up their lives. And He comes to make everything okay. He comes with forgiveness, with real life, and yes, with salvation, and all these He gives to you.

Peter was a mess. These women were trembling in fear. That's why Jesus came to them. And that's why He comes to you here in Galilee.

Here at His table of Communion is Galilee. If it's been a while, too long, since you have been to Galilee, come. Come with your regrets, your shame, your fears. Come with your sins, with your sinful past. Your Lord meets you here in bread and wine with pure grace and mercy. This is not the table of judgment. It is His table of forgiveness for you. Here is where the storm is stilled for you. Here there is peace and calm. For here, in Galilee, is the Crucified and Risen Lord Jesus for you, my friend, for you. Amen.