

Easter

Text: Matthew 28:1-10

Preacher: The Rev. R. Bruce Todd

St. Peter's - Lafayette Hill, PA.

April 12, 2009

“No Dread of Being Dead!”

Are you afraid? Do you have fear? We all tend to have some sort of fear. Quite a few people have - Arachnophobia - a fear of Spiders. Now that's not to be confused with - Acrophobia - Fear of Heights. In fact - there are so many fears - or phobias - that psychologists have come up with names for many of them.

For example, if you have a fear of crowds—then you have ochlophobia. Fear of darkness - you have nyctophobia. Being looked at by other people? You have scopophobia. Loneliness - you have monophobia. Marriage - you have gamophobia. Poverty - you have peniaphobia.. Responsibility - you have hypengyophobia. Ridicule (being made fun of) - you have categelophobia. Fear of school? Yep, you guessed it, schoolphobia. Fear of God - Theophobia. And fear of hell - hadephobia. But the fear I want to address today is thanatophobia - the Fear of Death! It's a fear that most people won't even talk about. We all have some sort of fear.

There was a man who participated in a local community-wide Easter pageant. People from all over the county tried out for various parts. The part of Mary Magdalene was given to a Catholic nun, a local doctor became Peter, a high school principle became Judas, and Caiphais, the hypocritical high priest, was played by a local banker. It was relatively easy selecting the people for the various parts in the Easter pageant. However, the part of Jesus was difficult to cast. No one seemed to fit the director's idea of what Jesus would be like - no one, that is, except for the most unlikely character, a big, burly, oil field worker. But, he was out of the question. How could the director select someone to play the part of Jesus who cursed like a sailor, and had a reputation for barroom brawls? But he was the one she chose, because - to her - he was the logical choice.

Finally, the day of the Easter pageant arrived and people from all over the state came to see the performance. There must have been 10,000 people gathered on the hillside to watch the dramatic re-enactment of the last week in the life of Jesus. When they came to that part of the play where Jesus was led away to be crucified, one little man who was simply filling in as an extra as a part of the crowd, became caught up in the emotion of the part, he joined in on the shouts of "Crucify!" ... "Crucify!" ... "Crucify Him!"

As Jesus was being led away toward Calvary, carrying the Cross on his back, he walked past this little man in the crowd, who was still caught up in the emotion of the moment, shouting insults at the top of his voice. Just as the character playing Jesus walked by, this little man spit in his face. The big, burly man stopped in his tracks. He reached up and wiped his

face dry, looked at this little man, and said, "I'll be back to take care of you after the Resurrection."

Fear of the Resurrection! There is no phobia for that. The little man who spat on Jesus was experiencing fear of potential PAIN! But it was fear of the Resurrection that was especially present at the tomb on Easter Morning. The two Marys set out before dawn to reach Jesus' tomb just as it's becoming light. The women were going to the tomb to mourn. That was their reality. But as soon as they arrive at the tomb that grim reality becomes high drama. There's an Earthquake; an Angel descending from heaven; the stone at the Tomb being rolled away; and what does the Angel say? "Do not be afraid!!!"

Yeah, Right! Here you are being faced with Quake-a-phobia, Angelaphobia and Tombstonaphobia, all at once. And we're being told - "Do not be afraid!" Okay - once this all sets in and they are at the point where they can pay attention to what the Angel is saying- they are told, "I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here! Come look for yourself! He's not here! He's going ahead of you to Galilee. Go tell the disciples to meet him there." So we're told they left the tomb - WITH FEAR! But fear mixed with GREAT JOY! But as they're running to tell the disciples, they have an Encounter with the risen Christ. Jesus knows how most people will react if they see someone who has come back from the dead. So what does he say? "DO NOT BE AFRAID!"

DEATH - was always something to be feared. But now we have an Angel at a Grave saying: "Do not be Afraid!" Then Jesus - a person who died - and is now ALIVE! What does he say? "Do not be Afraid!" The message of Easter is that there should be NO DREAD IN BEING DEAD! Something that was once feared no longer has the final word. Jesus died - and rose from the dead - to tell us that there is no dread in being dead. Do not be afraid! Death no longer something to be feared.

I kinda wish I would attend my own funeral. Well yeah, I know my body will be there. But I mean all of me! Spirit and everything. I wonder if God gives us viewing rights? I sometimes think about writing my own funeral sermon - that someone else would have to read. I think I would say to my friends: "So I had to DIE before you would finally come to Church?!" You should try it again before YOU die - - - and that doesn't just mean on Christmas and Easter. (Oh - that doesn't mean any of you here today.) Because if you'd come to church more often, you'd hear that death is only the entrance into Eternal Life!" DO NOT BE AFRAID! There is no dread of being dead. But people must be afraid of death because they never want to talk about it.

Just this past week I was visiting Marian Gallagher in the hospital. On Monday she was on a respirator, had tubes down her throat, wasn't able to speak (which is tough for Marian) and WAS on death's doorstep. But on Thursday, she and I were in bed together - um - wait a minute - we were SITTING on the bed together, laughing about how I didn't have time to plan a funeral during Holy Week. I told her to do her homework - pick her hymns - list her favorite

scripture passages - have her funeral service planned. DO NOT BE AFRAID! I have file folders full of stuff people have told me they want to have in their funeral service. They usually tell me their family refuses to talk about death. I guess they think if you talk about it, it's going to happen. Well ladies and gentlemen - it IS going to happen. We're ALL going to die someday. But I've had some of these funeral plans in my files for years, and they'll keep for many more. But one thing those files tell me, is that HERE are some people who do not fear death! We've talked about it - planned for it - Laughed about it because we are told - DO NOT BE AFRAID. We have No Dread of Being Dead. We live by FAITH - Faith is a *Risen* Lord. DO NOT BE AFRAID!

We heed this message in many areas of our life. We're presently in the midst of an economic crisis. But here at St. Peter's we're not afraid. We're giving an extra Dollar-a-Day and we're meeting our budget and making our mortgage payments. Here at St. Peter's we're not afraid. We know God will provide enough for us to feed and clothe ourselves and our families so we aren't afraid to give some of our food, clothing and other resources to help our neighbors in need. Here at St. Peter's we're not afraid that God will provide for our present needs, so we can take on a Building Program to meet the church's future needs. Here at St. Peter's we're not afraid to welcome everyone into God's Church regardless of their ethnic background, their financial level, the sexuality, their age group, their health status, or any characteristic, because we know that our Lord worked on how to include people - not exclude them. Here at St. Peter's we DO NOT LIVE IN FEAR - WE LIVE BY FAITH. And when it comes to Death - something people fear MOST! We remember our Lord's words at the tomb - "DO NOT BE AFRAID!"

Remember that big burly man from the Easter Pageant? He looked at that little man, and said, "I'll be back to take care of you after the Resurrection." He may have been paraphrasing, but that was basically the message of Jesus. "I'll be back to take care of you after the Resurrection." On Easter our Lord came back from the grave to say "DO NOT BE AFRAID!"

Christians have No Dread of Being Dead! Because WE have the promise of Eternal LIFE! So on this Easter morning we not only say *HE* Is Risen - we also can say WE ARE RISEN! WE ARE RISEN INDEED! ALLELUIA! Amen