

What are you afraid of? Unless you're playing the macho card, we have to admit, we're all afraid of something. Maybe you're afraid of mice or spiders; big crowds or tight spaces. Maybe you're afraid to lose your job, your health, or someone you love. Maybe you're afraid of your guilty past, your guilty present, or how God feels about your guiltiness. Whether physical, or spiritual, we're all afraid of something, or more often, a lot of somethings!

I thought a lot about fear this week. And the more I thought about it, the more I concluded that every fear is the result of uncertainty. People are afraid of snakes because they're uncertain if the snake will slither away or latch onto their leg. Afraid of the dark because they're uncertain what might be lurking around them. Afraid of losing their job, because they're uncertain how they'd make ends meet. Afraid of losing a loved one, because they're uncertain how they'd handle the grief. Afraid of death, because they're uncertain what comes next. All fears result from uncertainty.

Logically then, if we can remove uncertainty, we'd have no reason for fear. Easier said than done, right? "Too good to be true, Pastor!" Hear me out though, when I say, ***Easter Erases Fear***. This Easter, embrace how Christ's empty tomb removes uncertainty from our lives, and therefore erases all of our fears.

Our gospel from Matthew 28 is a case study of how Easter erases fear. Matthew lets us into the lives of some of Jesus' female followers, who were shackled with uncertainty and fear after what they'd witnessed in the past 48 hours.

On Friday afternoon, two Marys-- Mary Magdalene and Mary, the wife of Clopas-- had stood near the cross, mournfully watching Jesus' life ebbing away. That evening, they watched two men quickly wrap Jesus' lifeless corpse, and place it in a new tomb, rolling a huge stone over the entrance. Saturday was the Sabbath, a day intended for rest. But how could they rest when their hearts overflowed with sadness, uncertainty, and fear? "We thought he was the one. Were we fools to believe? What happens to us now?" A dead Jesus left everything uncertain and fearful in his followers' lives.

As Sunday was dawning, the women, bearing spices, set off for Jesus' grave, conceding, "He's dead. There's nothing we can do except give him a proper burial." They traveled with slow, joyless steps to the mournful tomb where they'd watched their Lord laid to rest. Their minds swimming with uncertainty, wondering aloud, "Who will roll the stone away so we can get into the tomb?" They wouldn't have to worry about that, though. God had already taken care of it!

Early Sunday morning, before the women arrived, ***"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. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men."***

God sent an angel to roll the stone away—not to let Jesus out, but to let people in! God wanted everyone to see inside, to see that tomb was empty! No Jesus, no body!

The angel terrified the soldiers. Men trained to be fearless melted into puddles and fled, as God laughed at mankind's futility to stop his power. The Pharisees had sealed Christ's tomb as securely as they could and posted those guards to keep watch, because the Pharisees knew they could prove Jesus was a liar if they could keep his body in that tomb. And yet, as easily as I open my fridge, the angel opens the tomb and reveals that it's empty. No one could keep the Savior dead!

That was the angel's message that drove the uncertainty and fear from these women's hearts. As they arrived, shocked to see the tomb standing open, the angel told them, ***"Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said; come and see the place where he lay."***

The women didn't flee in fear, because the angel's message caused their fears to flee! Just think of the implications of this message for these women, and for us! With Jesus dead, their lives were dark with fear and uncertainty. Everything they'd believed in, and even their eternity was up in the air. As Paul later wrote, ***"If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins."*** If Jesus had stayed dead, he couldn't give us eternal life more than any other headstone in the cemetery. If Jesus stayed dead, we'd be left wondering in uncertainty and fear, "How can we be saved?" If Jesus had stayed dead. And that's why Easter erases fear. Because he didn't stay dead! ***"He is not here; He has risen."*** The angel's message, and Jesus' empty tomb gives us complete certainty for our physical and spiritual fears.

As the angel said, Jesus "was crucified." We have no need for spiritual uncertainty over sin, because Jesus paid for the sins of the world on Good Friday, suffering hell on the cross, the punishment we deserved for our sin. The empty tomb proves that the Father accepted Jesus' payment in full. As Paul told the Romans, ***"Jesus was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."*** Just as a convict leaves prison after completing his required sentence, so Jesus left his prison of death, because he paid the sentence required for the world's sin!

Did you catch the angel's subtle reminder? ***"He has risen, just as he said"***? Jesus' followers had spent that weekend drowning in uncertainty and fear unnecessarily, because Jesus had told his disciples exactly what would happen from Maundy Thursday to Easter Sunday many times!

Matthew 16 tells us, ***"From that time on, Jesus began to explain to his disciples...that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."*** Shortly before Palm Sunday, Jesus again reveals, ***"The Son of Man will be.....condemned to death...and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life."*** On Maundy Thursday, in Jesus' last moments with his disciples, he assured them, ***"After I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."***

If the disciples had taken Jesus' promises to heart, they wouldn't have needed to fear. They could have confidently waited outside the tomb on Sunday morning for Jesus to rise! But can't the same thing be said of us? Our lives are full of unnecessary uncertainty and fear, because we don't always trust in Jesus' promises.

To remove every uncertainty and fear from your heart, Jesus has made promises to you. From the first sin, God promised a Savior. The empty tomb is proof that God never fails to keep his promises, as he sent Jesus to be that Savior, and completed that promise with Christ's resurrection.

Afraid of uncertain troubles in the world? Jesus promises, ***"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world"*** (John 16:33). The empty tomb guarantees security from every uncertainty. Jesus defeated the inevitable force of death that no one, except God, can. Christ is God! And as God, there is nothing in this world he doesn't hold complete control over, including every single one of your fears. There is nothing Jesus doesn't have power over!

Afraid of the uncertainty of death and eternity? Jesus promises, ***"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies"*** (John 11:25). Because Jesus defeated death, we have the promise of eternal life, and that when Jesus returns, we too will rise!

Afraid of an uncertain future? Jesus promises, ***“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).*** The Savior who loved you enough to set aside a crown of glory for a crown of thorns; to set aside immortality for death, so that we might live; do we really have to worry that he won’t love us enough to direct your future for your blessing?

The truth of Easter is, ***“Do not be afraid... He has risen.”*** And with that beautiful truth from the angel’s lips, uncertainty is crushed, and fear is removed. Jesus is our Savior, and he is alive! The tomb of sorrow and uncertainty, becomes a symbol of victory.

The angel sent the women off to tell the disciples, who were locked away in fear. Their slow, mournful walk becomes a joyful sprint, ***“afraid, yet filled with joy.”***

As much as the empty tomb made them joyful, in the back of their minds, there was lingering uncertainty—***“what if it’s a hoax, and our weary hearts are fooling us into believing something too good to be true?”***

“Do not be afraid.” Like an explosion, blasting away their remaining fear and uncertainty, Jesus stood before them...alive! In the same flesh and blood they’d followed; that they saw hanging on the cross; that they saw laid in the tomb. Jesus...is...alive. The women fall at Jesus’ feet, and worship him. Our Savior, who triumphed over death, who removed our guilt, who controls the world, who loves us unconditionally. He is alive. There is nothing left to fear.

That’s so beautifully clear from Jesus’ directive to the women, ***“Go and tell my brothers.”*** Amazingly, this is the first time Jesus ever called the disciples his “brothers.” After they’d abandoned him, denied him, forgotten his promises, He had every right to call them, “my enemies.” Yet, he calls those doubtful, fearful men his brothers.

And that’s why there’s nothing to fear. With his death, Jesus removed the sin that separated us from God, making us God’s children. We have nothing to fear—because the one who created and controls the universe is our Father. Because the one who defeated death and hell is our brother. There is no more uncertainty, so Easter erases fear!

I will admit—I’m pretty afraid of snakes. As a kid, I pretended to like them so my friends wouldn’t laugh at me, but one time a garter snake slithered over my foot and I screamed like a baby. But at the zoo, I can stand in front of the case containing a twenty-foot Python, and I’m not afraid of it. Why? Because I know that unless the zoo wants to deal with a lawsuit, I’m certain that I’m totally protected.

That’s what Easter does! Yes, as I look at that giant snake, I still don’t like it. But I’m not afraid of it, because I’m certain it can’t harm me. That empty Easter tomb gives us certainty that Jesus’ love, Jesus’ power, and Jesus’ promises protect us, a protective case from all that we fear. Yes, we don’t like death, or cancer, or unemployment, or darkness, or terrorist attacks. But we don’t need to be afraid of them. Because our Savior Jesus, in whom we trust, didn’t stay dead! In the face of every fear and uncertainty, the angel’s words give us peace. ***“Do not be afraid. He has risen!”*** He has risen indeed!