

*When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?" But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'" Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid. – Mark 16:1-8*

As we celebrated yesterday, Jesus was crucified and died, and was laid in a tomb with a huge stone rolled into a sloping rut so it could not be moved except by a group of very strong people. Yet on the third morning, when the ladies came to care for the body, the stone had already been rolled away and the body was gone. An angel was there waiting for them, and told them that Jesus was alive! He wasn't dead any more, but was going on to meet them in Galilee. The Gospel of Mark, assumed to be written from Peter's stories of Jesus, then ends differently than any of the other gospels. It ends with the women fleeing silently in fear. No amazement, no appearance by Jesus Himself, no shining hope for the future. Just trembling, bewildered fear.

I think there is no better antidote to the fear of COVID-19 than the Resurrection. While we are all afraid of this virus and the reports about its effect on our elderly and compromised population, we are also afraid of our own effect on the financial, educational, and commercial aspects of our society. It seems that the overriding emotion of the world right now is fear. And so a Gospel that ends in fear may be a good one to read for Easter this year. But only because while it acknowledges the reality of fear, the story itself doesn't end there.

There are many ways to battle fear, and we try all of them when we are frightened. Fact can defeat fear, because much of our fear is of the unknown, the out-of-control, the bogeyman around the next corner. So when we get afraid, we learn all we can about that which scares us. Unfortunately, we have learned to turn to sources that only pretend to know facts, and so we have to relearn how to find truth. But regardless, even with all we know about the coronavirus, fact isn't helping us much.

Courage can defeat fear. "Courage is not the lack of fear, but action in spite of it," the saying goes. When we can face our fear, we grow less concerned with it and more able to stand against it. But with a virus like this, courage probably looks like people out in it, refusing to cower at home, which is exactly how this virus spreads.

I truly believe that the best answer to our fears today is the resurrection. Any rational fear of this virus ends with the possibility of death. And while that possibility is very low for much of our population, the barrage of alarmist news reports and constant talk about the worst we've seen keeps us afraid nonetheless. But with death taken out of the picture – for that is a large part of what the Resurrection of Jesus accomplished for us – our fear disappears as well. Fear of death is the endpoint of most of our fear, so without a fear of death, with the faith that Jesus' promise of not only His resurrection but ours as well is truth, we can face anything this world throws our way. Violence, sickness, war, danger – these are horrible things, things that Jesus wants us to fight, but they no longer hold a trembling, bewildering fear for us. Now that is Good News!