

“God’s Not Worried”

Luke 24:1-12

4/4/10-Easter

Peter ran and looked for himself.

Whoever you are, wherever you are, whatever is going on in your life, big or small to your mind, count on Jesus. Death has lost its sting. There is eternal victory in Christ! There is hope for the hopeless, peace, and forgiveness.

This is no fairy tale. This is not just flowery sweet greeting card stuff. This is reality, Jesus’ risen body and His breath in your face reality.

The women went from mourning, to perplexed, to terrified, to awareness, to amazement.

Occupied tomb, to empty tomb.

Grave clothes, to dazzling clothes.

Finally the angel basically tells the women, What are you worried about? Jesus is alive.

What are you worried about?

Because God knows full well that there are a lot of us here this morning worried about something. There’s a lot going on in the world and in our lives. Real stuff. Heavy stuff. And God knows that it has been that way since time began.

Some of us are worried, feeling like we’re just gazing into an empty tomb.

Like someone said to me this week, sometimes you got to just turn off the radio and the news, because there are a lot of voices out there, a lot of news happening, a changing world, some of which can terrify us. It’s easy to get worried.

Look back through the life of Jesus. Peter was worried about Jesus talking about dying. A couple disciples were worried about who was going to have the best seat in heaven. The disciples were worried about the storm while they were in the boat on the sea. Peter was worried about the waves when he walked on the water with Jesus. Martha and Mary were worried about their brother, Lazarus, when he got sick and died. Peter was worried about others knowing he was a disciple when Jesus was arrested. The disciples were worried about what to do next, now that Jesus was killed.

But guess what. God wasn’t worried.

“Remember,” the angel said, “how Jesus told you, while He was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.”

Things were under control.

Yes, we are talking about power, power that will blow your mind and lift your spirit to a place you never thought possible. Rob Bell, pastor at Mars Hill Bible Church in Michigan says, “If somebody died and came back to life, that is a dangerous person because they’re not scared of much. You can chuck your flannelgraph, white-bathrobed Jesus, because this is one dangerous dude. He survived death. People who aren’t afraid of death are frightening to be around because they’ll do anything. If you have given your life to Jesus, you have trusted your life to somebody who knows what they’re going to do.”

God knows what He’s going to do: God’s not worried.

Now, that doesn’t mean that we start thinking like, “God’s got it all under control. I don’t have to do anything. Just sit back and let God work it all out.”

We still have our own steps to take. Peter ran to the tomb. He didn’t just sit there. We still have our own steps to take in life, but God is right there with us, empowering us, leading the way.

And that's just it—you got to run to God, to reality, not away from it. We get worried, and then run from reality and pretend what is going on doesn't exist. We can run from who we are and ignore what God wants to heal in our lives. But when we run we only end up entombed in it all, not truly free.

I read a perfect example of this in the news this week. Police say a motorist fleeing officers in Cleveland abandoned his car and made a run for it.

Garfield Heights police say the chase started in that suburb early Monday over a traffic violation and reached speeds of 90 mph. After a race through several communities, the driver and a passenger bolted from the car and headed for a fence.

They apparently did not realize it was the outside fence of the state women's prison in Cleveland.

Running away from God and reality, we end up in prison. But don't worry about these things. God is not.

Mary, Matthew, Paul told it well for us this morning in the drama.

God's love and creative power isn't worried about what was, but what can be.

Mary was an unknown teenage girl, ready to settle into an ordinary life. But God saw in Mary someone who would accept this great call to bear God's Son and all the questions and greatness that came with that.

Matthew was a tax collector, someone looked upon with suspicion and disliked by the general public. But Jesus' eyes saw something much more, someone willing to follow Jesus and begin this awesome journey into the world as one of the first believers.

Paul. How much we can and have said about Paul, who was first named Saul. Persecuting followers of Jesus. Putting fear into the hearts of those who were devoted to Jesus. But God saw someone who would be willing to go into the cities and connect with Romans and elite religious leaders and tell them about Jesus—that He was raised from the grave in glory and now opened the gates for all who believe to be transformed like Saul was into Paul—now full of love, hope, strength, not afraid of what others think, but simply desiring to get others to rethink their lives, and what all this means.

God's love isn't worried about what was, that is, what was your past, what used to define who you are, what used to control your life, what you always thought was possible. Or, for the church, what people have thought about the church until now, or what we always thought our potential was in serving our world.

God isn't worried about what was, because His love and creative power is always making things new, transforming death into life, ordinary into extraordinary, folks like us into messengers of hope.

God wasn't at all worried about what every human being in history up to that point when Jesus was killed thought about death. God didn't send Jesus into this world with His plan to save it by His death-defying love, only to get to that point in the story and stop, because, well, nobody thinks this is possible. "Peter denied me three times, he's not really going to believe that I actually rose from the dead. Better not then."

No!

God said, I am making all things new.

All things. That includes you and me. That includes our community. That includes those you think have no hope. That includes the darkest deepest places of this world.

God is a God who makes a way out of no way.

When all the ways of escape are shut off, when the world seems “shut up in the wilderness,” when the time comes that you, too, lie helpless before the oncoming night, listen, the Lord is here, you only have to be still.

God’s not worried. Oh, He is on the move, loving, creating, defeating the powers of death—but He’s not worried. And it is in His hands that we are carried—In Him, in Him who shattered death’s dark grip with His magnificent light of life, In Him we live and move and have our being.

I like how Eugene Peterson says it: “The Christian life is going to God. In going to God, Christians travel the same ground that everyone else walks on, breathe the same air, drink the same water, shop in the same stores, read the same newspapers, are citizens under the same government, pay the same prices for groceries and gasoline, fear the same dangers, are subject to the same pressures, get the same distresses, are buried in the same ground. The difference is that each step we walk, each breath we breathe, we know we are preserved by God, we know we are accompanied by God, we know we are ruled by God.”

“Write it down,” God said. You can trust Me in what I am telling you.

No matter what the situation, no matter how bad it is, God will have the last word. And God’s Word is life. Jesus did not stay in the tomb.

I cannot think of an Easter in recent memory where there was a bigger need for hope, for something that would breathe life into the human spirit. A year ago, so many people ... felt like they were on pretty solid ground. [Now they] find themselves in circumstances they never would have predicted.

A lot of people ... are feeling anxious. They have pressures ... that they did not have [before]. They [regret] decisions they’ve made over this last year. They wonder where things will stand a year from now.

Nobody ever wants a season of hard times ... to come, but when they do, they have a way of making you ... ask, *What am I really counting on? Am I building my life on a foundation that’s solid enough that circumstances beyond my control cannot take it away?* That’s why I’ve been looking forward to Easter ... [a time when] we gather to remember the only hope capable of sustaining a human life through everything.

People have not gathered for the past 2,000 years to say, "The stock market has risen. It has risen indeed." They have not gathered to say, "The dollar has risen. It has risen indeed." Or, "the employment rate has risen." Or, "the gross domestic product has risen." Or "the value of your 401(k) has risen." Here’s the one hope that has held up human beings across every continent and culture for two millennia of difficult times of poverty, disease, pain, hardship, [and] death itself: "Christ is risen. He is risen indeed."

John Ortberg, in the sermon "Resurrection: Metaphor or Miracle?" Menlo Park Presbyterian Church (Menlo Park, CA) (preached 4-12-09)

Amen.