

Scripture: Matthew 28:1-10

Sermon Topic: With Fear and Great Joy.

Text: Matthew 28:8 --"So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy....".

Proposition: The reaction of mixed fear and great joy brought by the resurrection of Jesus yields to a sense of pure joy as a person grows in Christian understanding.

Dates written: April 4, 1958

Revised April 13, 1974.

Dates and places preached:

April 6, 1958 (Easter), Grace
Methodist Church, Cheyenne, Wyoming
8:30 & 11:00 A.M.

March 29, 1959, Sheridan, Wyoming,
First Methodist Church, 9:30 &
11:00 A.M.

April 14, 1963, First Methodist
Church, Montrose, Colorado, 8:30
& 11:00 A.M.

April 14, 1974, ~~all~~ ~~and~~ ~~at~~ ~~the~~ ~~First~~ ~~U.M.~~
Church, ~~all~~ ~~and~~ ~~at~~ ~~the~~ ~~Florida~~

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Common Topic: With Fear and Great Joy

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Introduction:

1. Preparations were complete for the world's greatest non-atomic explosion, to rid North America's West Coast of its worst shipping menace. Weather was the only remaining question mark. If conditions were right (Saturday, April 5, 1958), 2,050,000 pounds of the most-powerful conventional explosive known was to be touched off the day after Easter.

A high ceiling, low pressure, southerly wind and no rain were needed to provide conditions for the explosion and prevent sideward spread of the massive concussion wave to the community of Cambell River, B.C., a town of 30,000 people seven miles to the south.

The blast was designed to rip 370,000 tons of rock off the twin peaks of a submarine mountain lying just below the surface of Seymour Narrows, between Vancouver Island and the mainland 100 miles north of Vancouver.

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If the unprecedented underwater explosion was successful as expected, it left a safe shipping channel 40 feet deep. (The Rocky Mountain News, Denver, Colorado, April 5, 1958).

2. In this event out west is illustrated the idea given in our Scripture and text, a mixed reaction of fear and joy. The people of the town of Campbell River undoubtedly are happy to have the hazard removed which has caused so much wreckage and loss of life near their home. Before the event they must have been amazed at the magnitude of the project, as were the news services that publicised it around the world. Their joy at the probable accomplishment of such a thing surely was great. We can imagine that fear was also present at the possibility of damage to their property and persons. Yet, the benefits to be gained by the vast explosion were so much greater than the damage possibilities that the job had to be attempted. Fear and joy were mixed at this event.

3. The women who went on the first Easter Sunday to the tomb of Christ, only to find it empty and someone

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3. The women who went on the first Easter Sunday to the tomb of Christ, only to find it empty and someone

strange to them there (the angel), who said that Jesus was risen, were also stricken with "fear and great joy," as Matthew records it.

4. Easter still is a time that causes in people a reaction of both fear and joy. It is to think about some of these reactions to the resurrection that we use our sermon time here today.

I. The resurrection does put fear into people sometimes, we know.

1. We fear being accused of being gullible when we say we believe it happened as it is recorded in the gospels. We are like the disciple named Thomas in that we have to see for ourselves to believe; and we have not seen. After all, we've never known anything like it at first hand. Maybe those who call the resurrection a superstitious story are right! At least, we are not going "out on a limb" and proclaim very loudly our belief. Whoever heard of soldiers acting like those on guard at the tomb of Jesus? Who that we know and trust ever really has seen angels and

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spoken with them, outside of a dream? Who ever really knew first hand of a person appearing in closed rooms without using door or window, or of the same person walking on water, or of him suddenly appearing from nowhere to be with two friends as they were walking along? These are things we read about the resurrected Jesus, in the gospels. We are afraid, very often, to accept these things. They are outside our experience, so we can't believe them. We don't want to seem gullible. We fear.

2. Another reason that the resurrection causes us to fear to accept it is the possibility that we could be resurrected ourselves so as to be punished for our wrong doings. The idea of eternal life almost always does include the thought of reward and punishment, of heaven and hell. If we could just go to sleep in death and never awaken, sort of black out permanently, it would be so much safer to live now any way we want to. "Have your fun any old way, die, and that's an end to it! Such is the apparent philosophy behind much of today's loose morality. However, if there is an eternal punishment of some sort

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for our misdoings in this life, then many of us have to fear greatly what the next life may bring. This is a real reason to fear accepting the resurrection beliefs, that Christ arose with its accompanying belief in eternity for all people, good and bad alike.

Some persons go off the deep end on this theory of punishment after death. There are people who describe God as a grim and vengeful judge, who lacks mercy and weighs out exact justice. There are folks who worry about committing the unpardonable sin. There is no unpardonable sin, actually, except the refusal to accept God's pardon!

3. We could mention other fears which the resurrection prompts. One is fear of losing our material things if we put into practice our Christian principles. Some people say that business ethics and Christian ethics do not mix. Don't take seriously this Christian stuff about the ultimate outcome of life unless you want to be a failure in this life, they say. Fear of the resurrection based on concern for our material things often is a barrier to Christian faith.

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There are other serious barriers to faith, too.

II. Fear often is mixed with a joy which you cannot completely repress.

1. A deaf old man invested in one of those new hearing aids that are part of your eye glasses in such a way that people don't know you can hear better. A few days later he returned to the store to express his delight. "I'll bet your family likes it, too," said the salesman.

"Oh, they don't know I've got it," said the old man. "And am I having fun! In the past week I've changed my will twice."

(Sunshine Magazine, 3-74).

The old man heard some things he liked, that made him happy, and some he didn't like which made him mad.

2. In spite of doubts about the resurrection story, people still love to hear it. That is why you flock to church on Easter. The old, old story is beautiful, comforting, and worth hearing again. In spite of doubts, there is joy in it. God has made us so that we do not want to die, and here we are told that we do not.

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3. We like to be reminded that even as late as our last conscious moments of earthly life repentance is acceptable to God, and his forgiveness will be granted then. We remember Jesus saying to the thief who was dying on the cross beside him, "This day you shall be with me in paradise." That can make us careless, though. We may tend to say, "I'm not ready yet. I'll change and live a good life some day, but right now I want to have my fun." Common sense reminds us, though, that death often comes quickly; so that often there is no "later" chance in which to change for the good. If we feel joyous about a tolerant and forgiving God, as the Christian gospel says he is, we should take advantage of his love and his pardon as soon in life as possible.

4. The fear we may feel in thinking about eternal life because we like the material things we have now can be kept in balance when we remember that we must at death give up ~~these~~ things to others anyway. Things can be sources of comfort and pleasure; but they can also be a lot of bother to keep and care for. Things really are not the most important aspects of life.

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Many a wealthy and successful person who "had everything" has realized this. We believe that our standing with God is not influenced by how much of this world's goods and money we can get together, or accumulate. Our fear of eternity is all mixed up with our joy that we can participate in it.

III. As you grow in Christian understanding and experience, your sense of joy over the resurrection is intensified.

1. A young and energetic man was running his own business. He seemed to be always cheerful. He always showed a personal interest in his customers. He did not seem to become less cheerful as it became obvious that his business was failing, which it finally did. He noted one day that one of his customers was in a "blue mood," and inquired the reason, and was told why. Grinning, he made it clear that he, too, had some pretty strong reasons to be blue, but that because of his christian faith he was not all that down. He remarked that whatever happened in this life he would not worry, for heaven would be great.

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"Sometimes I get so homesick for heaven, don't you?" he said. The customer was not in that kind of mood or spirit, and answered, "I don't know. I've never been there, and I don't get homesick for somewhere I've never lived." The young business man was right, though. A joyful belief in life after death is very reassuring and comforting.

2. Faith and joy in a good and never-ending future can lead to another characteristic of life which most people covet or want: to independence. Independence of thought and of action is a growing trait of a Christian. You have little to fear from God if you are actively seeking to do God's will in your life. You have little to fear from other people as long as you follow the gleam that is Christ. At the very worst, other people can torture and kill you. If you believe that after death there is a glorious life with God then you have real reason to remain steadfast in your faith, no matter what may come. A christian sticks by his beliefs and acts on them, regardless of the cost now, in this life, because nothing that can happen to him now is worth

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avoiding it to avoid it would cause him to give up the joys of his future life in eternity. Such a faith has been the strength of Christian martyrs and of most great christian leaders through the ages. Such a faith gives an independence in this life that you can know in no other way.

3. As you follow Jesus in service to others, your understanding of them increases. As you serve other people you find gratitude and friendship from many whom you help; and that alone usually is sufficient reward. As a christian you believe that just as Christ died for other persons but rose from death, so by giving yourself in real sacrifice for others you can find true happiness too, now and in the life after the grave.

Conclusion:

1. We have thought of the reaction ~~today~~ of mixed joy and fear which was shown by Mary and Mary Magdalene at the tomb on Easter day. We have found in their Easter experience great similiarity to some of our own feelings about Easter. We have seen that the resurrection does put fear into many people today, too.

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2. This fear often is mixed with joy which cannot be suppressed, we said.

3. As you grow in Christian understanding and experience, your sense of joy over the resurrection fact becomes more pronounced by far than the fearful aspects of your reaction to Easter.

4. Your reaction of mixed fear and joy brought by the resurrection of Jesus should yield to a sense of pure joy as you grow in understanding of our Lord.

5. With Rev. A. H. Ackley, a hymn writer, we can say on this Easter Day:

"Rejoice, rejoice, O Christian, lift
up your heart and sing
Eternal hallelujahs to Jesus Christ
the King!

The Hope of all who seek Him, the
Help of all who find,
None other is so loving, so good and
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He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives
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You ask me how I know He lives?

He lives within my heart.

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