

Three Thoughts for Easter
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A Sermon for Sardis Baptist Church
4-21-2019

I think Easter and all of the “little Easters” we experience, can be summed up in three phrases:

Fear Not.

Remember.

Go. And tell everyone you meet.

Fear Not.

When we gathered on Christmas Eve, we read the second chapter of Luke’s gospel. We heard about shepherds wiping away sleep from groggy eyes. And in the dark of night, as they kept watch over their flocks, an angel of the Lord appeared, and they were terrified!!!

But the angel said, “Fear not. For behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy.” And that angel told them about a child that would change the world. And then the angels sang a Halleluiah chorus. And the shepherds went straight to Bethlehem to meet Mary and Joseph and Jesus, and when they got back they told everyone of what they’d seen and heard and done.

Fear not shepherds. And fear not Sardis. Fear not, even when God comes in mysterious ways, in the form a messenger, or on glassy seas, or in a cloud of transfiguration.

Fear not, because God is not like Caesar. Fear not, because God is present. Fear not, because God looks with favor upon those deemed lowly. Fear not, because God doesn’t come to dominate you, or to scare you into submission, or to make you feel less than, or to zap you like an evil, untamed super hero. Fear not, because God has come to love you. God has come to use you. God has come to transform you.

God brings good tidings of great joy: A savior, a child, reminds you that God's presence has been and will always be with you.

Fear not.

Remember.

It's April, but we're not done with angels of the Lord. Two Marys and Joanna, just like those shepherds, wipe sleep from groggy eyes in darkness. Only difference is this time it's closer to dawn than midnight. The three women have gone to the tomb to prepare the body of Jesus. But the stone is rolled away, and inside they find two men, dressed in dazzling white, you might call it the glory of the Lord shining all around them. And like the shepherds in the fields, the women are terrified at the sight of these strange men.

Like the shepherds, the three women receive helpful advice from their glowing messengers, but it's a little different. "Why are you looking here?" the angels say. "Remember. Remember what Jesus told you in the Galilee? All that he said would transpire has happened. And he's not here. He's among the living."

And that word "remember" is a catalyst. All of the sudden the women remember the real, transforming experiences they had in the presence of Jesus. And in that very instance, their lives change.

And I shouldn't cheapen my point with an illustration from pop culture... but I'm gonna anyway.

I have this image of the empty tomb, and the angels tell the women to "remember," and for dramatic effect, one of the angels pulls out his phone, finds Rachel Platten, and just hits play:

Like a small boat
On the ocean
Sending big waves
Into motion

And their memories begin to flood back to them.

Like how a single word
Can make a heart open
I might only have one match
But I can make an explosion

Mary Magdalene's bobbing her shoulders. Mary the mother of James is feeling it, too. Joanna's ready for the chorus.

And all those things I didn't say
Wrecking balls inside my brain
I will scream them loud tonight
Can you hear my voice this time?
This is my fight song
Take back my life song
Prove I'm alright song
My power's turned on
Starting right now I'll be strong
I'll play my fight song
And I don't really care if nobody else believes
'Cause I've still got a lot of fight left in me

And do you see those three brave women charging out of that tomb, ready to tell the men in their lives, the ones who remain scared, and skeptical, and hidden away – can you imagine these women telling them that the world's not what you think it has to be. This is our moment, our time, all of the things we've hoped for are real. There is elation. There is joy. There is confidence. There is faith. There is new life.

And it's all here, because three brave women chose to remember the presence of God in their lives. With Mary and Hannah, and all the strong, faithful, remarkable women before them, they proclaim, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior; The Mighty One has done great things for me, and Holy, Holy, Holy is God's name!"

Remember. For there is power in our memories.

Go. And tell everyone you meet.

In Luke's Gospel, God brings big news to marginalized persons: unwed teenage mothers, and barren old ladies, and mangy shepherds, and women with past demons, and characters who'd never be chosen as heralds in Caesar's world.

But God doesn't sort callings by zip code, or income, or any other form of status.

The inbreaking of God's realm is terrifying in every sense of the word – it's startling to see the world made right-side up. But God needs people who can hear the words "fear not" in the midst of God's presence, and really believe that there's nothing to fear.

And God needs people who can recognize and remember God's presence in a world that seeks to deny such a reality. God needs people who can see the divine in a tiny infant, or in a rabbi practicing radical hospitality in the Galilee, or at a table, or on a cross, or absent from an empty tomb, or in the more common, ordinal moments of life.

And when God finds those who recognize God's goodness, and remember God's presence, God needs them to be people who will go and tell everyone they meet.

When shepherds choose to believe in a good and decent God, they make their way to Bethlehem. And there they find new life. And they don't hoard such joy. They tell everyone they meet. And there is new life. Resurrection. Easter.

When grieving women look past the certainty of death, and brave the terror of glowing angels, and choose to remember the abundance of the one who taught them in the Galilee, they find new life. And when they have the courage to tell doubting disciples of that empty tomb, there is new life. Resurrection. Easter.

When Charlotteans read their headlines, they find the brokenness of our world – the weightiness and inevitability of poverty, and climate change, and all those -isms just to name a few. And it's terrifying. And we are afraid. But every day, there are people who hear familiar words: "fear not." And fearing not, they take meals to bus stations; or they advocate for fair housing; or they enter hospital

rooms and jail cells and homeless shelters armed only with earnest prayers and listening ears. And they remember what the Mighty One has done for them. And in that remembrance, they share the transforming power of God's presence. And with every little act, there is new life. Resurrection. Easter.

Friends, today, Easter, is not a day to belabor the science of dead bodies coming to back to life, or to exhaust conspiracy theories of empty tombs. To be honest, I think that's a fruitless endeavor. And I think it misses the point of our celebration.

Easter is the day we faith it. We faith that a good God gives us reason to fear not. Our good God has the ability to transform our world beyond the domination system of Rome and its crosses; beyond death; beyond anything we can imagine. And our good God is present with us. When we remember that presence, we are empowered by the spirit to live and to be Jesus in the world. And when we, like Jesus of Nazareth, and like the shepherds, and like Mary, Mary, and Joanna, tell the story of God in our lives, future generations are invited in to the same hope, the same peace, the same Christ that undergirds our world. God's world.

So fear not. And remember. And go and tell everyone you meet.

After all, Sardis Baptist Church, it's Easter. And we need new life. Amen.