

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

“So they went out and fled the tomb,  
for terror and amazement had seized them;  
and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”

It is with that sentence that Mark ends his Gospel.

Ends it.

I know, if you look in your bible there are some more words that follow,  
but scholars are almost unanimous that those words were added at a later date  
by other scribes.

The original ends right there -- for they were afraid.

What a way to end a gospel,  
a tale of good news;  
they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

The original Greek text is emphatic about it,  
using a double negative to drive the point home -- nothing to no-one.

If you think about it,  
we know they told someone, otherwise we wouldn't be here.

Even the author of the Gospel knew they told someone,  
otherwise he wouldn't need to be writing it down.

So why stop there?

A very good question.

It may be that there was something important about that sentence;  
some point that the evangelist felt it was important for us to understand.

OK, let's look a little closer.

Do you notice a theme in the sentence?

Terror, amazement, and afraid.

What do they have to do with the Good News?

In the original Greek text the words used are tromos, ekstasis, and phobeo.

Tromos is a variation of to tremble, something like quake with fear.

Phobeo is to be alarmed, or sometimes in awe of.

This is the word translated as sore-afraid in the old King James Version.

It is also where we get the English word phobia.

Ekstasis is literally a displacement of the mind, or bewilderment.

We get our word ecstasy from this word.

So what is it about these words that Mark felt were important

to leave in our mind after finding out about the resurrection.

Why would this deliriously good news inspire fear, terror, and amazement.

Well, amazement we can understand surely.

The stunning shock of the resurrection is a little difficult to take in, even today.

Oh, let's be frank, it is a lot difficult to take in.

It is completely beyond our ability to understand.

It is a mystery.

Sure we can say Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed!

But when it gets down to brass tacks

the resurrection is one whopper of a fish story.

It is hard to believe.

Many of us take church lightly because we don't *really* believe.

We show up every so often because we *might* believe.

You know, just in case there really is something to it.

And, believe it or not, that's OK.

Really, it is!

I have a friend who says that any reason to come to church is a good reason,

and I agree wholeheartedly with him.

But, let's imagine for a moment what it would be like to *really* believe.

To know in our hearts,

beyond the shadow of a doubt,

that Jesus of Nazareth actually rose from the dead.

What would it be like to have an angel tell you  
that Jesus is going on ahead of you, and you will see him soon.

(Pause)

What does it feel like?

Displacement of the mind doesn't quite cut it, does it.

It is no wonder those women ran from that tomb.

Any normal person would run for all they were worth,  
that is if they could convince their feet to move at all.

If God can really raise a man from the dead,  
then what does that mean for me.

This God has supreme power over me and could squash me like a bug on a whim.  
This is good news?

Suddenly, I am out of control.

I don't really run my life anymore.

I am no longer the master of my destiny.

I am, in short, in deep trouble.

All that I used to feel secure about,  
the ground of my very existence, has shifted.

If you have ever been in an earthquake,  
a real one,

then you know what this kind of fear is all about.

The earth is just not supposed to move.

And when it does it affects us deeply.

We have nightmares and don't sleep well for weeks.

It is a profoundly disturbing experience.

And that is the same reaction that we can expect

when we suddenly and truly come to believe in the resurrection;

when we get that revelation that allows us to believe --

When what we imagined just a moment ago, strikes home.  
The resurrection turns everything we know upside down and gives it a good shake.  
I think that is what Mark wanted to warn us about;

that the first response to this wonderful good news is usually fear.

So, where do we go from here?

There must be more.

There *is* more to the good news than fear, certainly,

but until we can get through that fear

and beyond it,

we cannot hear it.

Have you heard of the phrase, “to put the fear of God in to them?”,

as a way to explain an effort beyond our normal capacity?

That is what the resurrection does,

it puts the fear of God into us.

Truth to tell, that is what happens in any true encounter with God.

But if we can get *beyond* our fear,

we suddenly become aware that not only was Christ resurrected,

but he was resurrected for us,

And not the safe anonymous us of the group,

but the unsettling each one of us individually.

Jesus died and was resurrected for me – for my sins.

All of my mistakes and flaws don't separate me from God,

they endear me to God.

No matter how messed up I am,

God loves me!

And then it starts all over again.

The fear and the running.

With each new deepening revelation of faith

the ground of our being shakes beneath us.

Every time we encounter grace we respond first in fear.

Fear because it makes no sense

and we have been taught to run away from things we don't understand.

So how do we break the chain?

The sad truth is we can't!

We are what we were made to be and that isn't going to change.

We will be afraid every time.

Every time.

What is important is that we *remember* that truth.

When God tries to break into our lives and help us

often we are afraid of the change and reject it.

And God will try again and we will disbelieve and reject again.

Over and over again.

God will keep trying to embrace us

and we will keep running away;

wanting that love desperately,

but too afraid to stop running and let it overtake us.

It would be comical if it weren't so tragic.

As I was watching my neighbor play tag

with her three small nieces and nephew the other day

it suddenly hit me.

The answer came at me amid the shrieks and giggles of joy.

If we could only just remember,

Maybe,

just maybe,

the next time we encounter God

And the fear rises within us,

and we take off, running for what we think is our lives,

why not try to run just a little bit slower.

And like a parent chasing a beloved child,

God would catch us up.

Grabbing us from behind,

lifting us in a squeal of giggling into the air,

And enfolding us in those great arms of love.

Isn't that an image of grace worthy of Easter joy!

Alleluia, Christ is risen.

The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia!

Amen.