

## SERMON- Easter Sunday (A)

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Acts 10:34-43

Colossians 3:1-4

Matthew 28:1-10

St. Timothy's (Herndon)

April 9, 2023

Psalms 118:1-2, 14-24

### OPENING:

The angel tells the women at the tomb,

“Do not be afraid.”

Jesus tells the women at the tomb,

“Do not be afraid.”

“Do not be afraid” is the calling card of angels, and God’s, throughout Scripture. We can believe it to be true, we can put our faith there, that’s where we can find our rest and our safety.

But, when is the last time that you heard that phrase “Do not be afraid” and actually believed it?

Probably as a child, probably when a parent said it to you.

If someone were to say that to me, today, “do not be afraid”... it would probably have the opposite effect, that I definitely should be afraid of something.<sup>1</sup>

There is the old chestnut from Ronald Reagan: “The scariest 9 words in the English language are: ‘I am from the (federal) government and I am here to help.’”

I am not going to say that at the 10 am service, but I am going to say:

### BAPTISM:

“Do not be afraid”— because I am going to keep this short.

“Do not be afraid”—, although me standing in front of you *looks* like the sermon, the actual sermon is the baptism that will take place here in a moment.

Two of our children, Miss Samantha and Miss Layden, will preach that Easter hope, that Easter courage, the Easter faith in a moment.

Martin Luther is said to have said: “If anyone has faith, it’s a baby.”

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Vulnerable, defenseless, children approach the baptismal font, believing their parents that this is the right path, believing that the Church practices what it preaches,

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<sup>1</sup> Martin B. Copenhaver. 2010. “Pastoral Perspective” in Barbara Brown Taylor and David Bartlett, eds. *Feasting on the Word* (Year A, Volume 2). Louisville, Westminster John Knox: 346, 348.

<sup>2</sup> Season 2, Episode 12, “Aging” (around the 30-minute mark) *Brothers Zahl Podcast* [The Brothers Zahl Episode 12: Aging \(fireside.fm\)](https://www.brotherszahl.com/episode-12-aging)

and believing that God will be with them even in troubled waters, even when the darkness comes.

1 out of 3 ain't bad, in terms of percentages, at least in baseball, and when it's God you are counting on.

That's faith, that's hope in things unseen, that's trust.

“Don't be afraid”: we will tell Layden and Samantha when they come up.

And we will say “you are just coming up in front of a group of people you don't and getting water poured on you.”

“Don't be afraid.”

We are being a little bit misleading because baptism IS scary, not just the rite itself, but how it marks and changes you, calls you into new life.

That is scary.

### **ILLUSTRATION:**

There's a great scene in the miniseries *Station Eleven*, a scene of Easter proportions. *Station Eleven* is post-apocalyptic book written about a plague that wiped out 90% of the population, written before COVID-19.

The scene is between a young woman, Kirsten, and her adopted parent, Jeevan, who had saved Kirsten when she was a child during this horrible pandemic.

They did not know each other prior to their fateful pairing, but they survived and took care of each other.

When they reunited, Jeevan told her:

“Raising kids is hard, you know. Going in and out of sync. It's like a yo-yo. You love 'em but you get angry. You scare 'em, they run away.”

Kirsten tells him:

“I was never scared with you.”

Jeevan does not miss a beat, and tells him what every parent knows in their heart, and wants to say:

Jeevan says :

“I was ALWAYS scared with you.”<sup>3</sup>

That means that our “do not be afraid” is not quite as reassuring as God's, but we try to model God's love in our parenting and in our relationships with one another.

Baptism, infant Baptism, becomes a Sacrament of Parenthood,

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<sup>3</sup> [Killing the Father: Station Eleven \(Patrick Somerville, 2021\) \(substack.com\)](#)

it's where adults (parents and all of us here at St. Timothy's this morning) standing awkwardly in front of God and saying that we believe that the tomb is empty, that we believe in all the promises that Jesus made, that we believe that even though we are scared, that we will not let that fear consume us.

“Do not be afraid” says the Angel.

“Do not be afraid” says Jesus to the woman

“It is not assurance that nothing can go wrong, because often things do go wrong.

It is not assurance that everything turns out for the best, because, if we are honest, it seldom does.

Rather, it is assurance that, whatever may happen to us, whatever a day might hold, God has the power to strengthen and uphold us; that whatever we must face, we do not face it alone; that nothing we encounter is stronger than God's love; that ultimately God gets the last word; that in the end—and sometimes even before the end—God's love is triumphant.”<sup>4</sup>

## **CONCLUSION:**

I'll close with this. The scary thing is that God's LOVE itself is scary.

Most people would admit that God's Judgement is alarming, we walk around thinking God is keeping score on how I am living my life. That's alarming.

But do you know what? God's grace is terrifying.

Anyone can keep score and pass judgement.

Humans do a pretty good job of that.

God's grace is terrifying because: who would love me like that?

It's terrifying that God would love me like that,  
terrifying that God would care for me like that,  
die for me like,  
rise from the tomb for me like that.

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<sup>4</sup> Copenhaver, 348, 350.

To that, the angels say “Do not be afraid.”  
To that, Jesus says “Do not be afraid”

We are not Jesus,  
We are not even angels,  
so all we can be is messengers,  
delivering a message in a bottle to ourselves and a world living in fear:

Here is the one to take home with you this Easter Sunday:

“May you fear God so much,  
that you fear nothing else at all.”<sup>5</sup>

**AMEN**

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<sup>5</sup> [Oswald Chambers. The Highest Good—The Pilgrim’s Song Book, 537 L](#)