

Sermon for The Funeral in memory of Barbara Jean Orth

Date: September 11, 2020

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Jeremiah 31:1-6

Epistle Reading: Colossians 3:1-4

Gospel Reading: Matthew 28:1-10

Sermon Text: Matthew 28:1-10

Sermon Title: Do Not Fear

Hymns:

Beulah Land

Amazing Grace



Pastor James Groleau
St. John's Lutheran Church
1200 13th Avenue NW
Austin, MN 55912
Office: (507) 433-2642
Shepherd@JamesPlace.net
StJohnsAustinLCMS.org

Phone Streaming at: 518-906-1379
KAUS 1480 AM Sun. 9:00am



Text: Matthew 28:1-10

¹ After the day of worship, as the sun rose Sunday morning, Mary from Magdala and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

² Suddenly, there was a powerful earthquake. An angel of the Lord had come down from heaven, rolled the stone away, and was sitting on it. ³ He was as bright as lightning, and his clothes were as white as snow. ⁴ The guards were so deathly afraid of him that they shook.

⁵ The angel said to the women, “Don’t be afraid! I know you’re looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He’s not here. He has been brought back to life as he said. Come, see the place where he was lying. ⁷ Then go quickly, and tell his disciples that he has been brought back to life. He’s going ahead of them into Galilee. There they will see him. Take note that I have told you.”

⁸ They hurried away from the tomb with fear and great joy and ran to tell his disciples.

⁹ Suddenly, Jesus met them and greeted them. They went up to him, bowed down to worship him, and took hold of his feet.

¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, “Don’t be afraid! Go, tell my followers to go to Galilee. There they will see me.”

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Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Fear. It is one of the most powerful and crippling emotions we have. Sometimes our fears are rational and reasonable, like fearing the power of nature, and sometimes they are not like the fear of little spiders. Sometimes our fears are disabling and prevent us from taking part in things with others, and sometimes we can overcome those fears with a little courage. One thing is for certain when you're locked in fear's grip, when it has its hold on you, it is a very real and powerful thing and it can be overwhelming.

That's true not only of our personal fears but the fears that we face in the world. I think of the fear people have living under oppressive dictators. Then there is the fear of the unknown. What does the future hold? What is the doctor going to tell me? What will life be like without a loved one? We might ask, "how am I going to die? Am I going to suffer? And when? And what will it be like?" You know, that's a lot of fear with which to deal. Almost enough to make you wonder, how can we live?

Now I suppose there are two ways to deal with fear. The first is to ignore it, and just pretend none of that stuff exists. Ignorance is bliss, and if those things make me afraid, well I'm just not going to think about them. That might work, for a while but it's just not that easy to ignore life, and to shut out what we see happening around us. That never really works for long.

There is another way, a better way, a permanent way, and that is what we are celebrating today. It's not ignoring our fears but to know, trust and rejoice in a God and Savior who has dealt with everything that causes us to fear. He has come and conquered everything that is against us. He has come and faced our enemies, even death, and defeated them.

So He comes this day, triumphant from the grave, triumphant over death, triumphant over our sins, and triumphant over the devil! Victorious, He has a very simple message for us, spoken first by the angel, and then by Jesus Himself. The message of, what every worship service is all about, "Do not be afraid!"

Now you're probably thinking, "I've heard that before!" Well, that's true, because we often tell each other that very thing, trying to help each other out, but when we say that, it really doesn't make much difference, does it? We pat each other on the back, or give a warm smile, and say "Don't be afraid," but if you're the person who's afraid, you're thinking, "Easy for you to say! You're not the one facing this stuff!"

Today the One saying those words is the One who faced our fears head-on. He is the One who confronted whatever it is that is causing your fear, and defeated it. No sin, no wickedness, no enemy, no trouble, no disease, no hatred, no division, not anything in all creation escaped the victorious war He waged against all of it! When Jesus rose from the dead on Easter morning nothing was left that was not under His feet; that was not under His control; that was not under His authority and power, and His good and gracious will. Nothing! So when this One, this Jesus, our risen Savior, says “Do not be afraid” it does make a difference!

What causes our fear? Really? Isn't it the fact that we are not the ones in control? Things can happen to us that we can't prevent, and that we would rather not have happen. Things that seem too strong, overwhelming, and frightening. Things that leave us wondering what the future will hold, and unsure of how it's all going to turn out. So simply having someone tell us, “don't be afraid!” really doesn't help, because it really doesn't change anything!

Jesus did change things! In fact He changed everything. You see we are not in control, He is. He is not just the Almighty God, because God's strength can be frightening too! The strength and power of natural disasters for example, can leave us in fear and awe of the power of God! The fact that God is in control because He is almighty doesn't always take away our fear. It is the fact that Jesus, as our suffering Servant, as our suffering Savior, as true man and true God, is in control. That is a wondrous thing!

As a man our suffering Savior knows our fears. He faced them. He knows our troubles. He had them. He knows the pain. He endured that too. He knows the sins and temptation, He wrestled with them. He knows much more than we will ever know. He knows the full, all-out assault of Satan against Him. The weight of all the horrors of all the world's sin on His shoulders. Being completely ignored and forsaken by His Father. Being utterly alone to face our enemy, with no one to help. Then, like us, facing and entering death, relying solely on faith He says, “Father, into your hands I commit My spirit.¹” He faced it all.

Today, He is alive! He could not be defeated, but defeated all. All that came against Him, the full fury of sin, death, and devil, He defeated! So when He says to us, “Do not be afraid” those are not mere words, but words that do what they say! Words filled with the power of His resurrection. Words filled with forgiveness. Words filled with victory. Words that give us hope and not only for a life after this one, but for our lives right here and right now.

¹ Luke 23:46

Knowing that we have a Savior who is in control, a Savior who loves us, and laid down His life for us; a Savior who is risen for us, and who is ruling all things for us helps us hear and believe His words, “Do not be afraid!” Your King, who entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, humble and riding on a donkey, now enters our world and our lives, glorious and victorious, with not just palm branches and cloaks under His feet, but with all of our enemies under His feet!

Now, our enemy doesn’t like that truth so much, and so he is going to try to convince you that it isn’t true. While we do not need to be afraid of him any longer, he can still talk a mean talk. He can be pretty convincing; telling us endless lies about how bad and sinful we are; convincing us how great and powerful our troubles are; getting us to doubt the love, control and victory of our Savior.

“Just look around you,” the devil says! “Just look! You don’t look so victorious! Its all just talk. Just talk, is all it is. You should still be afraid. I’m the powerful one, after all.”

Sometimes it looks that way, doesn’t it? Sometimes it looks as if God is not in control. Certainly at the end of our lives it looks like sin, death and the power of the devil have won. When we look at a grave, we ask, “Where is the victory here? Where is the celebration of triumph here? Where is the joy and happiness the victors should have?” It doesn’t look like victory today, does it? We get afraid and things don’t seem so clear.

So the words of the apostle Paul are good for us to hear. They help us understand and see things, not as the devil wants us to see them but, as they really are. Paul said:

Since you were brought back to life with Christ, focus on the things that are above--where Christ holds the highest position. Keep your mind on things above, not on worldly things. You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. Christ is your life. When He appears, then you, too, will appear with Him in glory.²

Your life is hidden with Christ in God. Your enemy wants you to rely on what you can see, the sin and evil in the world, the sin and evil in your heart, the troubles and fears, the confusion and doubts, and he says, “SEE! I TOLD YOU SO!”

² Colossians 3:1-4

No! We point to the empty tomb, to our risen Lord, and say to Satan, “NO! **HE** TOLD YOU SO! He told you He would crush your head,³ and He did.⁴ He told you He would rise and conquer death,⁵ and He did.⁶ He told you He would destroy your stronghold, Hell,⁷ and He did.⁸ He told you He would forgive my sins,⁹ and He did.¹⁰ You can do nothing. Nothing! You have no power. Though my life, my victory, and my position as a child of God is hidden now, it is real. I know that my Redeemer lives, and I have nothing to fear.”

That, dear children of God, is the confidence that we have because of a day we celebrate called Easter Day. It is what every worship service is about, a mini celebration of Easter. That is what today is about. No matter what you are facing in your life, whatever challenges, whatever fears, whatever doubts, whatever uncertainties, whatever enemies, “Do not be afraid!” Your Savior has triumphed.

He is here for you, triumphing still. Here hidden, His body and blood hidden in, with, and under the bread and the wine of Holy Communion; hidden under the words of His Word and Absolution; hidden under the waters of His Baptism. He is here. Really here, and in control. Forgiving our sin, giving us faith, treading our enemy underfoot, and providing all that we need. Saying to you, “Do not be afraid.”

Barbara was excited to see her new home. She was ready to have her Savior call her home. She was not afraid. She was comfortable, peaceful, she was victorious. She was called home by her Savior and yours. Upon that call she closed her eyes, and opened them to behold the face of God, and she was not afraid.

- 3 **Genesis 3:15** – I will make you and the woman hostile toward each other. I will make your descendants and her Descendant hostile toward each other. *He will crush your head*, and you will bruise his heel.”
- 4 **John 19:30** – After Jesus had taken the vinegar, he said, “It is finished!” Then he bowed his head and died.
- 5 **Matthew 20:19** – They will make fun of Him, whip Him, and crucify Him, but on the third day *He will be brought back to life*.
- 6 **Matthew 28:10** – Then Jesus said to them, “Don’t be afraid! Go, tell my followers to go to Galilee. There they will see me.”
- 7 **Matthew 16:18** – You are Peter, and I can guarantee that on this rock I will build My church. And the gates of hell will not overpower it.
- 8 **1 Peter 3:19** – He also went to proclaim His victory to the spirits kept in Hell.
- 9 **Luke 7:48** – Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins have been forgiven.”
- 10 **Luke 23:34** – Jesus said, “Father, forgive them. They do not know what they are doing.”

What are you facing in your life right now? What seems too big to handle? Too great to forgive? Too strong? Too overwhelming?

Remember the angel said, “Don’t be afraid! I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here. He has been brought back to life as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying.¹¹”

The tomb is empty! That means we have a Savior who is risen from the dead, who is victorious, who is in control, who has won! Do not be afraid! Barbara’s first Sunday celebration in Heaven will come in just two short days, and she will have countless more for all eternity. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Alleluia. That which is sung by angels, is now sung also by Barbara, who will never have anything to fear ever again. Eternal peace is hers, and yours, in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.

11 Matthew 28:5-6