

Do Not Be Afraid ~ Easter Sunday, April 24, 2011
Matthew 28:1-10, Psalm 18:1-2, 14-24

This morning's scripture reading, from the gospel of Matthew, tells the story of the women going to the tomb Jesus had been placed in the day before. There are not a lot of details given, but it is most likely that they were going to prepare his body for burial. This was probably something they had done for those they loved many times. They knew what to expect. But, this time, things were very different. We can be certain that they were puzzled, confused and frightened by what it was they encountered. They were deep in grief, in that time of mourning, when we all suffer shock.

Then, we are told, there was an earthquake and the stone rolled away from the mouth of the tomb and an angel appeared to tell them "Do not be afraid." They must have had very strong constitutions not to have fainted at the least.

"Don't be afraid?" They had to try to make some sense of what had happened, through the fog of all their emotions. They had to try to suspend all they knew of their world and life to grasp that, what he had told them would happen, had indeed, happened. He had risen.

We are told they left the tomb in fear and joy to run and tell the disciples what they had seen. They encountered Jesus on the way. He told them once again, "Do not be afraid," just go and tell the others I will see them soon. And off they went.

We, who are far more knowledgeable and sophisticated about the world, would probably feel the same way those women did. We would have run as fast as we could go to tell the others who were our friends and his followers. We would have tried to figure out just what had happened and wonder how the laws of nature had been suspended for a moment to allow him to return to life. We would be met with the same reactions they encountered among the men—some believed and some doubted.

Here we are this morning, once again. We are just like the early disciples, some believe with all their hearts while others still have a doubt or two. But, it doesn't matter where it is we fall on the scale of belief. It doesn't. We know that God accepts and loves us just where we are in life and who we are. We also know that there is time for growth for us and time for us to reflect on the life and teachings of Jesus, as well as his death and resurrection. There is time us to make up our own minds about what happened on that first Easter morning.

What we do know is that Jesus came to show us the way we are supposed to live and move and have our beings to become the very best humans we can become. If we choose to follow his teachings of love and acceptance, of forgiveness and mercy of justice and kindness, at the end of our lives God will say to us, "Well, done, good and faithful servant." We are only human and the pathway is narrow and we have many times when we slip and fall. But we know, even in our human frailty, we are forgiven and loved and granted another chance to make all things bright and new again. As long as we draw breath, we can resurrect ourselves. We can move ahead in love and kindness, setting aside the harshness and, sometimes, ugliness, with which we deal with one another. We can refrain from sitting in judgment of others, thinking we have all the answers. We can seek first the kingdom of God and all that means, and set aside seeking all the things of humans and all that means. We can finally begin to understand that all our striving

after possessions means nothing and that he or she who ends up with the most is not the winner. In starting over, we can strive to work on the spiritual side of our selves, the side that reaches out to God seeking to understand how it is we can best serve our Creator and our fellow humans. How we can serve in love?

That's the reminder that comes to us each Easter morn. There is a far better way of living for us. There is a way that allows us to set aside our fears and not be afraid. We are loved and cherished by a God who never abandons us, even in our darkest hours. As the followers of Christ, we should understand this and know that, through this day of resurrection we are lifted up, too, to new ways of seeing and believing. We are encouraged forward into life, knowing that the same God that sustained and supported Jesus sustains and supports us. We live on remembering those words "Do not be afraid" of anything. For he is risen, he is risen, indeed.

-- Amen