

Exordium

Jesus could not have been any clearer. After Peter made his rock-solid confession that Jesus is the Christ, “[Jesus] began to teach [his disciples] that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again” (Mark 8:31). After he revealed his full glory on the Mount of Transfiguration and healed a boy with an unclean spirit, Jesus taught his disciples, saying, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise” (Mark 9:31). And right before James and John asked Jesus to let them sit at his right and left hand in his glory, as they were all going up to Jerusalem, Jesus said to them, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise” (Mark 10:33–34). And yet, despite all of this, how did they react when the women who had gone to the tomb told them the good news that Jesus had risen from the dead? “[T]hese words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them” (Luke 24:11). The disciples needed to see undeniable proof of Jesus’ resurrection before they were willing to believe it, even though every miracle that they had witnessed Jesus perform during his earthly ministry should have given them more than enough reason to believe that he could miraculously rise from the dead.

Has anything changed today? We have the words of Christ that tell us what he did. We have the evidence of the empty tomb. We have the eyewitness accounts of those who saw Jesus, the risen Lord, with their own eyes. And yet, sometimes, that isn’t enough for us. How do we know that all of that really happened? How do we know that it isn’t just an idle tale? Sometimes, we can be tempted to not believe unless we can see evidence of the resurrection with our own eyes. We

can be tempted to rely on reason alone, but that will not give us the answers we seek. Only by aligning our reason with what God has revealed in his Word and trusting completely in Jesus do we realize that we already have all the proof that we need, and it's all right here in the Word of God. And what a joyous message that Word of God gives us! Death is dead! Our sins: forgiven! Jesus, our Savior, stands victorious, and we shall one day join him, body and soul, in his eternal glory! Therefore, with joy and confidence that Jesus has risen, just as he said, let us rise and sing hymn #348: "He Is Arisen! Glorious Word!"

He is arisen! Glorious Word!
Now reconciled is God, my Lord;
The gates of heav'n are open.
My Jesus died triumphantly,
And Satan's arrows broken lie,
Destroyed hell's direst weapon.
O hear
What cheer!
Christ victorious
Riseth glorious,
Life He giveth—
He was dead, but see, He liveth!

Sermon Text (Mark 16:1–8 ESV)

¹ When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ² And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³ And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" ⁴ And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. ⁵ And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. ⁶ And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you." ⁸ And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Christ, the Risen Lord, Gives You Comfort

There is no shortage of fears in this world. In fact, searching for phobias online reveals that there are around 230 named phobias, give or take a few. Some of these phobias are more common,

such as arachnophobia, the fear of spiders; scotophobia, the fear of the dark; and necrophobia, the fear of death. However, some of these phobias can sound a bit strange to us, such as cherophobia, the fear of happiness; ephhebiphobia, the fear of youth or teenagers; and even phobophobia, the fear of fear itself or having a phobia. There are various ways that people try to treat phobias, such as exposure therapy, which is meant to help you learn ways to control and calm yourself by gradually exposing you to your fears. However, even if we are able to find ways to deal with or even overcome our fears, is there any manmade solution that is able to give us true, lasting comfort in the face of our fears?

In our reading for today, we hear the women, who went to the tomb early in the morning on Easter Sunday, experience fear. Why were they afraid? Our reading explains that, when they entered the tomb, “they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe” (verse 5). The women were afraid because they were in the presence of an angel, a holy messenger of God. As the glory of the Lord shone from the angel, the women were made aware of just how unholy they were. They were completely corrupted by sin. Not a single part of them was left untainted. The women knew that they were not worthy of being in the presence of such a holy being. In fact, they knew all too well that what they actually deserved was death, and they were afraid that this angel, this holy messenger of God, was going to pronounce this judgement on them.

This fear that the women felt is one phobia that all of us can relate to. Just like phobias, there is no shortage of sins in this world. There are times when we sinned privately, and there are times when we sinned publicly. There are times when we sinned by choosing to do what is wrong, and there are times when we sinned by choosing to not do what is right. There are times when we did something that we didn’t know was wrong (in fact, we may have even thought that what we did was the right thing), and there are times when we knew that something was wrong, but we

willingly did it anyway. We don't just experience one or two of these types of sins, like we do with phobias; we have been completely corrupted with sin in all of its forms. Therefore, when we die and stand before the glorious presence of the Almighty God, what will we say to him when we have to give an account of everything that we did in this life? For the person who has no comfort, there is nothing that he will be able to say to excuse his sinful actions, and that is truly terrifying.

But if it's true that we will have to give an account of everything that we did in this life before the God that demands that we be holy like him, then what comfort is there? We have the same comfort that the angel gave to the women at the empty tomb. The angel said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him" (verse 6). The angel did not just tell the women to not be afraid because he wasn't going to pass judgement on them and put them to death for their sins; he also told them to not be afraid because there was evidence right before their eyes that their sins had been forgiven.

Just three days earlier, on Good Friday, Jesus was put to death for your sins. As he hung on the cross, Jesus bore the weight of all your sins: your private sins and your public sins; your sins of commission (doing what is wrong) and your sins of omission (failing to do what is right); your sins that you didn't know were sins and your sins that you clearly knew were sins. On that cross, Jesus bore all of your sins as though they were his own, and God the Father passed judgement on him for it. But Jesus didn't stay dead. On the third day, he rose again, proving that God the Father accepted the payment that he made for your sins by taking the punishment for you and dying in your place. Therefore, you have no need to fear giving an account of everything that you did in this life before the holy God, because Jesus has removed all of your sins and given you his holy life. When God the Father looks at you, he no longer sees a completely filthy sinner. He now sees

his own perfect child, who has been washed clean in the blood of his only begotten Son. And because you have been washed in the blood of Jesus, you shall one day rise from the dead, just as he did, and experience eternal life in heaven with him. If Jesus had not been raised, you would not have this comfort, because it would mean that God the Father had not accepted Jesus' payment. But Jesus has been raised. Therefore, true, lasting comfort is yours.

How did the women react to this amazing and comforting news? “[T]hey went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid” (verse 8). The women were amazed by this news, but they were also afraid. Why did they continue to fear? Because they were overwhelmed by the news and did not understand it. They still fully intended to tell the disciples what the angel had told them to, but they did not speak to anyone else that they ran into along the way due to the fear that came from their lack of understanding of this good news.

We can all relate to the fear that the women felt. After all, there are plenty of fears that we can have that come from a lack of understanding or from not knowing what is going to happen. There are times when we might not know how we are going to be able to afford basic necessities; there are times when we may not know if our health or the health of our loved ones will improve or get worse; there are times when we may not understand the decisions that other people make; and there are times when we might not understand why God is allowing us to suffer certain hardships. Despite having the good and comforting news that Jesus is risen right in front of us, we can still become overwhelmed by the fears of this life, no matter what they may be.

In times like these, the world can try to offer us comfort. It can tell us that it's okay, because things could be worse; it can tell us that things will get better, so we just have to endure until it does; it can tell us that we should look on the bright side. If we are provided comfort by the world,

it is only a temporary comfort, but it's only through Jesus that we are provided with true, lasting comfort.

The women experienced this true, lasting comfort as they ran to tell the disciples what the angel had told them to. While they continued to fear due to their lack of understanding, Jesus appeared to them and said, "Do not be afraid" (Matthew 28:10). Upon seeing Jesus, the risen Lord, and hearing his words of comfort, all of their fear was now gone. Jesus gave them understanding.

You may not be able to see Jesus with your eyes, like the women did. However, Jesus still speaks to you with his words of comfort through his Word. When you are burdened by the fears of this life, both the fears of sin and the fears that are caused by sin, Jesus says to you, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). And you know that you can put your trust in Jesus and "[cast] all your anxieties on him" (1 Peter 5:7) because he is risen; because he has defeated sin and the fears that sin causes, putting them to death with him and declaring his victory over them by rising from the dead. And, someday, you too shall rise, with a glorious body, just as Jesus did, to live forever in heaven, where you will be free from all fear. You can therefore say with Job, who lost everything he had, including his own health, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!" (Job 19:25–27). There is no shortage of fears in this world, but Christ, your risen Lord, gives you true, lasting comfort.