

Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed, Alleluia!

“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.” Thus ends our text. Somewhat of a lackluster ending to our Easter Gospel reading, right? This is the Gospel of the Lord, Praise to you, o Christ! That response doesn’t quite seem to fit right.

1. (oops!) Why would the women leave with fear? I suppose it does make sense. They came to the tomb with spices ready to anoint the body of Jesus. Perhaps in their shock and grief they went to the tomb without much of a plan. You think they would have thought about the big problem of a stone in front of the tomb!

Alarm piles on top of alarm. They arrive at the tomb, and the stone is rolled back. A “young man” who we understand to be an angel tells them **“Do not be alarmed.”** It is a frightful thing to stand in the presence of an angel. It stands to reason that the women left the tomb with trembling and astonishment because they were afraid.

But even on a high holy day like Easter, I think we can relate to trembling, astonishment, and fear. 2. (ugh!) Despite a word of hope, trembling and astonishment seizes us. We hear the Easter proclamation, “Christ is Risen, He is Risen, indeed, Alleluia!” But we tremble.

We tremble as we’re thankful for the crowd we have today, but it ain’t what it used to be as many of the people who used to fill these pews have moved out or are now with the Lord. There used to be a need for multiple services on a Sunday due to space constraints. Our wonderful Easter Garden is filled with flowers given in memory of those who are not here. Those tombs aren’t empty.

We tremble as we’ve had two deaths in the congregation so far in 2024, and I can’t promise there won’t be more as the year progresses. We’re fearful as our hair continues to gray, our hearing and sight deteriorates, and our kids just aren’t that into church anymore.

We’re astonished at the anger that wells up when your daughter gets cancer in her 30s. We’re astonished that when despite our best plans—our bringing spices to the tomb kind of preparation plans—they don’t seem to pan out as vehicles break down, appliances die, and homes need major repairs.

We’re alarmed when the tears just can’t stop falling when grandma passes away, and we know better. We know on Easter Jesus rose from the dead. We know we’ll see grandma again. We know the Lord will wipe every tear from our eyes, but why does it seem they’ll never stop manufacturing tissues?

At times we are afraid. We know good overcomes evil. We know the devil doesn’t win. We know Jesus defeats death, but there sure seems to be a lot of death

all around us. The news speaks of wars, terrorist attacks, and drunk drivers killing innocent young people. It sure seems evil is having its way.

“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.” If we think about it, maybe we can relate to the women’s fears. Yay for Spring! Yay for cute bunnies and pastel eggs! Yay for Jesus’ rising from the dead, but maybe today we’re not feeling it. Yeah, the resurrection is a promise of good things coming our way, but actions speak louder than words. Get me my candy in my plastic egg. Get me my Easter potluck brunch. Get me home.

What word of hope do we have that’s greater than just a promise? Pastor, how can you turn my trembling, astonishment, and fear into peace, hope, and joy? In our Gospel reading of Mark 16:1–8, it would be nice to have had Jesus encounter the women face to face, but instead, all we get is a promise from the angel to the women. **“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.”** And that’s all we get, too. We haven’t seen the risen Jesus like the women and the disciples eventually do just a few verses later. Sometimes, we feel stuck between verse 8 when they leave in fear and trembling, and verse 9 when He appears to Mary Magdalene.

But let us not underestimate the power of the crucified one’s promises! 3. (aha!) The Crucified one transforms fear into faith. DESPITE OUR FEAR AND TREMBLING, JESUS THE CRUCIFIED HAS RISEN! Christ has risen!

4. (whee!) The crucified one is working to turn our fear into courage. The angel refers to Jesus as the Crucified One. He was and is the crucified one. To quote one commentator, after Good Friday, “Our Lord is never not the Crucified One!” In fact, in the heavenly vision of Revelation 5:12, the heavenly beings praise Jesus saying, **“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”** The way the Greek tenses read, this is the one who is and remains slain. He was slain, He was crucified, yet He lives!

In layman’s terms, the point is not that Easter erases Good Friday, but it sanctifies it. Jesus’ resurrection doesn’t ignore the fact that He suffered, died, and was buried, but it gives meaning to His suffering, death, and burial. The empty tomb shines light back to the horrors of Good Friday and proclaims that even those trials are worth the trouble.

And so we gather here for another Easter. Trembling because things aren’t what they used to be. Alarmed by the death all around us. Astonished at the ill fortune that has seized us between breakdowns, bills, and health failing. Fearful as we sometimes don’t feel the happy happy joy joy that we think Christians should feel on days like today. But Jesus stands in our midst transforming our Good

Fridays into Easter Sundays. The was and still is Crucified One knows how best to heal our woes and transform our sufferings into glories because He already went through the wringer. He already suffered sin, death, and hell for you, and He came out of the other end alive again.

It's not that Good Friday didn't hurt. It sure did! The disciples fled. Our Savior bled. And the news of His death spread. But Easter means we can go forward even in times of trembling, alarm, astonishment, and fear knowing that Jesus is working with us to redeem that suffering.

We gather with hope today because 5. (yeah!) The promises of Easter will become more than "just words." And so it is with confident joy that we gather here today. We are left with the promise of the angel, but we know that it's more than just words. It is the promise of the Lord who never fails us.

Despite the initial speechless fear of the women at the tomb, they became the first witnesses to the resurrection and became a key part of the early church community.

As we tremble as we consider the faithful who have passed away, we believe they aren't truly away. The saints in heaven surround us as a cloud of witnesses, and especially as we gather in the presence of the Lord in worship and with His body and blood in Holy Communion, we aren't so far away from our loved ones, even if, for the time being, their tombs remain occupied.

In the midst of an aging church with adult children who have dispersed in all directions, we trust in the Lord who gathers His Church through the Holy Spirit. He is working to bring back to faith those who have strayed. He has promised to never leave or forsake His bride, the Church.

In the midst of our astonishment at a broken world—broken bodies, broken machines, broken societies—our Lord gives us Easter hope in the City of God that will come down from Heaven when He returns to resurrect us and to judge the living and the dead. This astonishment gives way to trust that the Crucified one is even working redemption and repair in a fallen world.

Even if all outward evidence points to the contrary, on Easter we can take to heart the words of the angel. Christ is risen!... Because of this, good has conquered evil. Life has swallowed death, and the Jesus has crushed Satan underfoot. Even in the midst of suffering, Jesus is turning our trembling, astonishment, and fear into Easter peace, hope, and joy! We trust this even when we can't always feel it.

We will see the loved ones who have died in the faith again: this promise is true and certain. Jesus will wipe away every tear and heal every disease: the was and is Crucified one cannot lie. There may be mourning and suffering in the between, but we never suffer alone, we have the Church. We have Christian friends; we have our Lord and Savior walking alongside us. We will arrive at the day when these things come true. This is our hope and celebration on Easter.