

Title **Do Not Be Afraid!**

Text: Matthew 28:1-10

Preacher: Edward Bellis

Date: April 5, 2026 (Easter)

Friends, let me invite you into a moment.

You wake up early with the women. So early, the sun is still deciding whether to rise. The air is cool, and the world feels hushed, as if creation itself is holding its breath. You are walking along a path you never wanted to walk, carrying spices you never wanted to carry. Because this is what you do when love has been crucified. You prepare for endings.

You expect a stone. You expect silence. You expect death to have the final word. And yet... something is not right. The stone is rolled away.

You stop. Your heart races. Your mind tries to make sense of what your eyes are seeing. Because sometimes, when God is at work, the first thing we feel is not certainty but confusion.

Friends, I have a three-word message for us this morning. These three words are powerful. These three words offer hope. These three words offer peace. What are these three transformative words? (Pause)

Christ is Risen!

And because this is not a message to be heard alone, but proclaimed together, let us say it as the church has said it for generations: I will say: *Christ is risen!* And you respond: *He is risen indeed!* Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Again, let it settle deeper: Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Now you stay at the tomb just a little longer. Matthew tells us it is “after the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning.” The women come carrying grief, carrying love, and carrying questions. And then, the earth shakes, and an angel descends. The stone is rolled away, not to let Jesus out, but to let them see in. And the message comes, clear and steady:

“Do not be afraid... He is not here, for he has been raised.”

Now, let us be honest. “Do not be afraid” may be the hardest word for us to hear, not just then, but now. Because we live in a time when fear is easy to find.

We see it in the divisions that run deep across our nation. We hear it in the anger that rises so quickly in our public life. We feel it in the uncertainty about the future, about safety, about truth, about what kind of world we are becoming. Fear shapes us if we let it.

Fear shapes how we speak. Fear shapes how we listen, and even shapes how we see one another. Our fear builds walls, draws lines, and fear decides who belongs and who does not. And into that very real, very human condition, our gospel powerfully speaks: “Do not be afraid.”

Not because everything is fine, but because it is not. Not because the world is simple, but because it is not. But because something deeper is true.

The resurrection is not just a happy ending. Rather, the resurrection is God's great act of reordering reality, and God declaring that the powers we think are ultimate... are not. Not death. Not violence. Not hatred. Not division. None of these gets the final word. Because "Christ is Risen. He is risen indeed."

And yet, we know in our secret heart that this truth does not arrive as we expect. It does not come through domination, force, or by winning or overpowering.

Our truth comes in a garden. Our truth enters through the voices of women whose voices were once dismissed. Our truth comes through an empty tomb instead of a throne. This is the upside-down nature of the gospel that Jesus declared. Where the last are first. Where the weak are strong. Where life comes out of death. And perhaps that is exactly the word we need.

Because we are so often tempted to believe that the way forward with Jesus should be louder, stronger, and sharper. But Easter offers us another story.

The women leave the tomb, Matthew says, with "fear and great joy." Both emotions are present at the same time. Not one replacing the other, but both held together. And isn't that where we live?

We carry concern for our world... and hope for what it could be. We feel grief over what is broken... and longing for what could be made whole. We experience both fear and great joy right now. And right there, in that tension, our women are called to preach. They are told: "Go and tell."

They do not wait until their fear is gone. They do not wait until everything makes sense. They just go, and their love leads the way.

And then—on the road—Jesus meets them. Not at the tomb. Not in certainty. But on the way, Jesus appears. And his first words? Jesus says, "Greetings." And then again, those powerful words: "Do not be afraid."

Now I wonder... What if that is where resurrection meets us, too? Not at the end of all our questions. Not on the other side of all our fears. But right in the middle of them. As we are on the road, in motion, and in the ordinary steps of an ordinary life. Jesus meets us and speaks to us, too, saying, "Do not be afraid."

Think about the disciples. They are not bold. They are not confident. At this point in Matthew, they are behind locked doors because they are afraid. Fear has closed them in. But resurrection does not leave them there.

Slowly—like dawn breaking—fear gives way to wonder. Wonder gives way to hope. Hope gives way to courage. And those who once hid... begin to speak. Those who once feared... begin to live differently. What changed? They began to believe:

They believed, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Paul tells us that this is not just Jesus' story—it is ours. He says, "We die with Christ... and we rise with Christ." Our old selves—shaped by fear and sin—are gone and buried. And a new life begins as we walk on the road with Jesus. An encounter with Christ invites us to live a life not defined by fear... but by hope.

But let us not pretend fear disappears. Fear does not. Our fears return. Fear whispers in our ear and lingers in our hearts. And so, the word comes again and again: “Do not be afraid.” Not as a command to feel different. But as an invitation to live differently.

Because here is the quiet truth of Easter. The stone is rolled away... whether we are ready or not. Christ is risen... whether we fully understand it or not. And hope is alive... even when we are not quite sure how to carry it.

So maybe faith is not the absence of fear. Maybe faith is taking a step while fear remains. By opening a door, speaking a kind word, choosing grace over anger, and hope over despair, fear moves to its proper size as we shine the light of Christ onto the monsters under the bed.

Not because we are certain. But because something has happened. The stone that sealed love in the borrowed cave is empty. And that changes things. It changes how we see one another. It changes how we live in a divided world. It changes what we believe is possible.

Because if God can bring life out of death... then perhaps reconciliation is not beyond reach. Perhaps peace is not naïve. Perhaps love is not foolish.

And one day—someday—we will each face our own ending. But even there, Easter speaks. Because Christ is risen, death is not the end of your story. Friends, God knows your name. God holds your life in God’s powerful, loving grip of grace, and God carries you beyond the grave.

And so, friends... we come to the end. Or what we thought was the end. But Matthew will not let us stay at the tomb. The women are still moving. They are still carrying fear and great joy, and suddenly, unexpectedly... Jesus meets them on the road.

Not when they are ready. Not when they are fearless. But while they are still becoming. And he says, “Do not be afraid.”

So, I wonder, what would it look like for us to leave this place like those women? Not fearless, but faithful. Not certain of everything, but certain of this: “Christ is Risen. He is risen indeed.”

And if that is true, then fear does not get the last word. Not in your life nor in this world.

So, when fear rises – and it will... when the world feels uncertain – and it does... when your heart is heavy... Listen. Our Master’s voice—steady, risen, and near—says: “Do not be afraid.” And maybe... just maybe... that is enough.

Enough for one more step. One more act of courage. One more word of grace. One more reason to hope.

So go, friends. Go into this day, into this world. Not because everything is resolved in your life, but because something has begun. Let us say these words again, “Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

And that... that is enough. Amen.