

FACING FEAR

John 20:11-29

I want to do something here this morning that we do not typically do. I want to start the sermon by giving you a quiz. That always puts the fear into my students at IWU, so I thought I would try it on you as well to see if it puts a fear in you. So ... here we go ... this is a group quiz, so it only takes one to get it right for you to pass ...

- What is Trichophobia? ... Fear of hair
- What is Uranophobia? ... Fear of heaven.
- What is Quadrophobia? ... Fear of the number four.
- What is Macrophobia? ... Fear of long waits.
- What is Phobophobia ... Fear of fear.

I need to tell you that when I looked up phobias on the internet ... there were over 1,000 phobias listed. In fact, there were so many that it just about caused me to go into a panic attack because of my Meganeumerophobia (fear of large numbers). My guess is that all of us have some phobias ... right? We have all been afraid of something.

Charles Allen spoke of fear in his book ... "Victory in the Valleys" ... when he wrote that 5-year old Johnny was in the kitchen as his mother was making supper. She asked him to go into the pantry and get her a can of tomato soup, but he didn't want to go in alone. "It's dark in there and I'm scared." She asked again, and he persisted. Finally, she said, "It's OK--Jesus will be in there with you." Johnny walked hesitantly to the door and slowly opened it. He peeked inside, saw it was dark, and started to leave when all at once an idea came, and he said: "Jesus, if you're in there, would you hand me that can of tomato soup?"

Charles Allen, Victory in the Valleys.

I want to talk to you this morning about fear. That seems like an unlikely subject for Easter morning, doesn't it? But it really is not at all. The first Easter was filled with fear.

Would you turn with me to **JOHN 20:11-29** this morning and let's take a look at three fears that the Bible shares with us that took place that first Easter. But I don't want us to just see the fears ... I want us to see the solution to those fears that our passage gives us.

Let me set the scenario before we get into the text. The week just previous to our passage this morning was what most people might have seen as a tragic and fear-filled week! I think we would have felt that way had we been alive at that point.

Jesus ... the great Rabbi ... who many of the Jews believed was going to be the Messiah that would deliver them from the bondage of the Roman Empire ... had been captured ... been put on a mock trial ... and condemned to death and nailed to a cross. The Crucifixion on the cross was a horrendous death to die and therefore the choice of capital punishment by the Romans. And their hero-to-be is experiencing that very torture right there in front of their eyes.

The hopes and dreams of so many people were dashed as they saw the life-blood ooze out of his body and stain the ground below. And to make things even worse ... there Rabbi ... Jesus ... cried out "It is finished." What did he mean? What was finished? Was he talking about his efforts at becoming the King of Israel that would set the people of God free at last? Did he fail to complete his mission? Was it all a bust? Had the people wasted their time? Did they put their faith in the wrong guy?

And since he is dead ... Now what? What do they do now? Where do they go? Who do they follow? Will Israel ever be saved?

That is the underlying fear of the people in today's text. Let's take a look at those fears and the solution to those fears ...

1 ... THE FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN

Let's read **VERSES 11-15** ... ¹¹ Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. ¹³ They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." ¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ He asked her, "Woman, why are you

crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

Mary Magdalene had gone to the tomb of Jesus to view the body ... but it was not there. We can look back today and say "Of course it is not there Mary ... he has risen." But remember ... she has not seen the risen Savior yet. She does not know what all has happened. 20/20 hindsight is always better than being there at the moment. She is afraid because she has no clue what has happened to the body of Jesus.

You ever been there? You ever been overcome by the fear of the unknown?

- What if my place of employment closes the doors?
- What if my son/daughter does not come home from the military?
- What if my husband/wife leaves me?

An Arab chief tells the story of a spy captured and sentenced to death by a general in the Persian army. This general had the strange custom of giving condemned criminals a choice between the firing squad and "the big, black door."

The moment for execution drew near, and guards brought the spy to the Persian general, "What will it be," asked the general, "the firing squad or 'the big, black door?'" The spy hesitated for a long time. Finally, he chose the firing squad.

A few minutes later, hearing the shots ring out confirming the spy's execution, the general turned to his aide and said, "They always prefer the known to the unknown. People fear what they don't know. Yet, we gave him a choice."

"What lies beyond the big door?" asked the aide. "Freedom," replied the general. "I've known only a few brave enough to take that door."

The best opportunities in our lives stand behind the forbidding door of the great unknown.

Don McCullough, Solana Beach, California, quoted in *Leadership*, Winter Quarter, 1992, p. 57

We are afraid of the unknown ... right? So was Mary Magdalene.

There is a solution to that fear of the unknown though ... Let's read **VERSES 16-18** ... ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in

Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher”).¹⁷ Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’ ”¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her.

So how did Jesus take away the fear of the unknown? By making himself known to Mary. And that is the very same thing that he does for you and me today! He takes away the fear of the unknown by making his presence known.

The solution for the fear of the unknown is realizing the presence of Christ with us.

But the fear of the unknown is not the only fear we see on that first Easter ...

2 ... THE FEAR OF BEING UNPROTECTED

Look at **VERSE 19a ...**¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked **for fear of the Jewish leaders,**

Why do you suppose the doors were locked? Why were they afraid of the Jewish leaders? They were afraid they were next.

There is an ancient piece of literature named “The Thirty-Six Strategies of Ancient China.” The authors are unknown. Strategy #18 says ... “you first have to take out the leader of your strong enemy. After that; your whole enemy will lose the fighting spirit and will flee or surrender.”

I have no idea who came up with these acrostics ... but let me share with you two definitions of Fear ...

- **F**orget **E**verything **A**nd **R**un
- Or ... **F**ace **E**verything **A**nd **R**ise

The disciples chose the first route ... forget everything and run.

We see these disciples do the exact same thing in the Garden of Gethsemane just a couple of days before. The soldiers come to arrest Christ and they all forgot everything and ran.

We are a lot like them, aren't we? When things get a bit risky ... we get a bit skittish! We find a place to hide. But we don't have to do that! We don't have to be afraid of being unprotected. Not if we are followers of Christ.

Notice how Christ cures their fear of being unprotected? Let's look at **VERSES 19b-23** ... Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." ²² And with that **he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."** ²³ If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

VERSE 22 is a key verse in the gospels.

- Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. The Cross gives us forgiveness
- Jesus Christ raised from the dead to defeat the power of death. The empty grave gives us eternal life
- And ... in **VERSE 22** it tells us that He breathes the Holy Spirit into our very souls so that we have power to live a life free from the fears of this world

We are not left unprotected! We are protected by the very eternal Trinity ... present in our lives in the essence of the Holy Spirit.

The solution for the fear of being unprotected is realizing the power of Christ in us.

There is one more fear ...

3 ... THE FEAR OF THE UNSEEN

This fear was not solved on that first Easter day. It took place a week later ... but nevertheless ... It was a fear that was solved by the Resurrection.

Look at **VERSES 24-25** ... ²⁴ Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "**Unless I see** the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

I find it amazing that Thomas ... who has traveled with these disciples for at least 1 ½ years does not trust them. They tell him they have seen Christ and you would think he was from Missouri ... the “SHOW ME” state.

So, what does Christ do? Look at **VERSES 26-28** ... ²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” ²⁸ Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

Jesus shows himself to Thomas. And not only does he appear in front of him ... just in case Thomas might think he is seeing a ghost ... he tells him to touch him.

You ever wonder where Jesus is ... especially when things look really gloomy around you?

- Maybe you have lost a loved one ... Where is Jesus?
- Maybe you are struggling with depression ... Where is Jesus?
- Maybe Satan is attacking and getting the best of you ... Where is Jesus?

Bad things are happening and you don't see Jesus anywhere.

Look what Jesus tells Thomas in **VERSE 29** ... ²⁹ Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Friends ... you know what the definition of believing in something unseen is? **HEBREWS 11:1** says ... Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

The solution for the fear of the unseen is realizing faith in Christ who is for us.

CONCLUSION

The story I shared with you at the beginning of the sermon ... the story of little Johnny sent on a mission to get a can of tomato soup. His mother was a wise woman ... “Don't be afraid Johnny, Jesus is with you.”

Friends ... there is one more question on that quiz that we started the sermon with ... what is monophobia? It is something that ... if you are a follower of Christ ... you never have to worry about ... it is the fear of being left alone.

“Don’t be afraid Johnny, Jesus is with you!”