



April 16, 2017  
Easter Sunday  
Matthew 28:1-10  
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### Brace for Impact!

There are three words I hope I never hear aboard a plane. And they have nothing to do with lost luggage, or even, after this week, with giving up my overbooked seat. Those I could probably deal with. No, if you've seen the movie *Sully* you know what the three most ominous words are. *This is the captain speaking. BRACE FOR IMPACT.*

They are words which strike fear in our hearts. They are words which can immobilize us indefinitely—or summon us into action. And, surprisingly enough, they are words which can prepare us for the consequences of the first Easter event.

*BRACE FOR IMPACT.* If only the security guards at the tomb had been warned, maybe they wouldn't have frozen in place, acting like dead men, when the angel rolled the stone away, the earth rattled and rocked, and inside the tomb, there was no body. But there were no flight attendants to caution them, *BRACE! HEADS DOWN, STAY DOWN! BRACE! HEADS DOWN, STAY DOWN!* These men were on duty in a cemetery, and what could happen in a cemetery? Guarding the grave of a dead man seems like a pretty easy job, because dead men can't cause trouble, can they? They just had to keep anyone from tampering with that big stone. The astonishing event they witnessed was in itself fearful, but it might have been the fear of punishment for failing at their job which immobilized them. They weren't ready for this. They were scared to death. They couldn't move.

*BRACE FOR IMPACT.* It's not often that the Bible omits the names of the men on the scene and tells us the names of the women. But in this case, it's Mary and Mary, two women who showed up to carry out the ministry of mourning, to anoint the body of their loved one who had died. Their leader. Their beloved. Their Jesus, whose brutal, unjust death had surely ripped their hearts out and torn their world to pieces. Traveling with Jesus and the other disciples, these women had heard his warnings that by heading for Jerusalem, they were heading into a storm of conflict. For he told them three times, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him." Maybe they didn't believe it would really happen. Maybe they, with the others, discounted the warnings. But they had heard them. And when it happened, when Jesus was arrested and tried and crucified in the span of one day, they felt the impact, whether they were braced for it or not. It was deeply real to them. On that Sunday morning, the women named Mary were walking in the fog of grief, numb with shock, going step by step through the rituals because that's what women in their culture did.

They witnessed the same terrifying scene as the guards. But when they angel spoke, and said what angels always do, "*DON'T BE AFRAID,*" they were at least somewhat prepared to hear astounding but good news. When they looked inside the tomb and saw that it was empty, they must have remembered what else Jesus had said, the surprise twist to the grim forecast of his death: "And on the third day he will be raised." What else can explain their response, so different from the response of the guards? Instead of being scared to death, they were motivated to new life!

So off they ran, obeying the command of the angel, to quickly tell the rest of the disciples. And, *BRACE FOR IMPACT,* who do they meet on the way but Jesus himself, risen from the dead! This is a breathtaking story, astounding, astonishing, amazing—and frightening. From where we sit in the comfort of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, maybe we've heard the story too many times to feel its shock-worthy claim that

Jesus, who was crucified, is risen from the dead! "Good morning, how do you do, Jesus, how are your nail wounds, have you recovered from the whipping you received a few nights ago, what was it like in that dark tomb, and how does it feel to be up and out of your grave now, Jesus?" What do you say to a dead man who is dead no more?

The Marys fell to his feet and worshiped him. And again, they heard the words, "DON'T BE AFRAID." Again, they heard the message they were to deliver to the disciples, "GO TO GALILEE. HE WILL MEET YOU THERE." Again, they felt their fear turning to joy and awe and wonder that Christ was indeed risen. The impact of this news would resound in them for the rest of their lives. And it would change the world.

Because they were braced for impact. Ready to live beyond fear, set to trust in the good news of the resurrection, and quick to go wherever they were sent.

To be messengers of hope and joy and life, and with that message, make an impact on the world.

I'm going to make an educated guess that few of us came here this morning expecting to have to "brace for impact" of any sort. Easter has become for us a day of celebration, of festivity, of family, and of fun. I was getting my hair cut a few days ago when the stylist, making conversation, asked me, "So, do you have anything fun planned for Easter weekend?" "Well, I'm a pastor," I responded. "I'll get to rest on Sunday afternoon." Easter is colored eggs and candy, lots of eating, and a celebration of spring. We think of Easter as comforting, not frightening, nostalgic, not life-changing. And here I am saying "brace for impact," and we are singing, over and over, "be not afraid." What's that all about?

What it's about is the most stunning event in human history, a startling story with implications for our life and death that we too easily take for granted. What? A man who was dead is now alive? Death was not final? Sin was not the victor? Evil did not have the last word? NO! Christ is risen from the dead is the central affirmation of Christian faith, it's the bottom line of our belief, it's the truest thing we claim and it changes everything! Mary and Mary saw it, they touched him, they told it, they testified to it—the world turned upside down and LIFE won. GOD won. HUMAN BEINGS won, thanks to God's grace and mercy. This is bigger than a plane crash and more powerful than an earthquake. This is an impact we need to brace for, a change we need to prepare for, news we need to bow our heads down for, for "Christ is risen" gives us a new start to a new life.

And that can be frightening, which is why the message "be not afraid" is so important. There are many messengers in our world today who are telling us, "Be afraid. Be very afraid." Indeed, there are scary forces afoot in our world. Terrorism, nuclear war, environmental destruction, diseases, criminals, natural disasters, financial stress, drugs, guns, violence—no one can deny these realities. But be wary of those who pump up our fears. Be cautious of those who prey on our fears, promising protection if only you will buy my product, if only you will vote for me, if only you will join me in excluding those dangerous others, whatever. These purveyors of fear are motivated by their thirst for power, or by their greed, or by their own fear. The message which God's angels, God's messengers, always deliver is the opposite—"Be not afraid." It's also what the risen Christ says to Mary and Mary when he senses their apprehension at seeing him. Something so earth-shattering as resurrection ought to inspire the fear of God—sometimes it causes me to tremble, says the spiritual—but God sets us at ease. When we hear the message of the angels, the message of Jesus, our fear morphs into awe and wonder and soon joy prevails.

And then, watch out, world. Brace for the impact which changed human souls can have on this old world. If we go home today unchanged by the time we've spent together hearing this astounding Bible story, singing the joyful Easter songs, and sharing the Lord's Supper, then we might as well not have come. If we go home still dominated by fear, we missed the message. And if we fail to grasp the challenge in the Easter story, the summons to action, then we are no better than the guards at the tomb who acted like dead men. For this change in the world calls for a change in those who hear its message, who are called to change the world around us in the direction of God's will. *BRACE FOR IMPACT*, world. Here come the Easter People.

The Easter People, like Mary and Mary, head out to the places like Galilee where others need to hear the life-affirming, death-destroying message of God. The presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, the Rev. Michael Curry, often asks, "Where is your Galilee?" And he answers his own question, saying,

Galilee.

Which is a way of talking about the world.

Galilee.

In the streets of the city.

Galilee.

In our rural communities.

Galilee in our hospitals.

Galilee in our office places.

Galilee where God's children live and dwell there.

In Galilee you will meet the living Christ, for He has already gone ahead of you.

(<http://www.episcopalchurch.org/posts/publicaffairs/presiding-bishop-michael-curry-jesus-movement-and-we-are-episcopal-church>)

Easter People, this story changes everything. Nearly 2000 years ago, it began a movement which spread from a backwater territory of the Roman Empire to reach every continent on the globe. We are part of that movement, the Jesus movement, motivated by resurrection faith that goodness is stronger than evil, love is stronger than hate, light is stronger than darkness, life is stronger than death. We are part of that movement, and this story which we tell every year motivates us for the year to come, squelching our fears and encouraging us to live in hope and trust, following the way of Jesus. We are part of that movement, praise be to God. We survived the plane crash, the crucifixion. We are motivated by Christ's resurrection, and the promise of our own. Alleluia. Christ is risen, indeed.

Friends, Easter People, let this story change you. Let it mobilize you for God's will. Let it dispel your fears and give you such joy that you will run with gladness the way before you, no matter how hard that way may be, toward the promise of eternal life. And together, this impact we have felt will impact the world.

I promise. For Christ is risen. (HE IS RISEN INDEED!)