Matthew 28:5 “Do not be afraid! I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. 6He is not here. He has risen, just as he said.

Oh what a beautiful and wonderful day. That’s just the way I feel about the wonders and marvels of what this day is all about. This day is absolutely, the heart and core of everything we are as God’s children.

But let me dispel a few of the newer myths connected with this day. First, stop acting as if the women in our history actually did a great and wonderful thing. I will admit, that they are the first followers of Jesus who get to proclaim that Jesus has risen but please, they only got to do that because of a complete lack of faith! What do I mean?

Jesus for the past 6 to 9 months has been telling his disciples, including the women, that he was going to be arrested, tried, crucified and die. He also made it absolutely clear to them that he was going to rise from the dead after three days! This promise was made absolutely clear. For that matter, the promise was so well known that even the Chief Priest and Jewish leaders had gone to Pilate asking for a guard and security lest the world be scammed! The women are actually headed to the tomb to further anoint and add spices to the body of Jesus because they did not think the hasty work done on Good Friday by Joseph and Nicodemus was adequate. We are told that they were bringing more spices and such to finish the job and do right for the body of Jesus. In other words, they did not believe he was coming back to life! Their presence at the tomb was an act of unbelief. Yes, they had loved Jesus but he was dead and their actions make it clear they thought he would remain dead just like everyone else they knew.

Next, recognize that the women still didn’t get things straight. It is interesting. Evidently the first to the tomb was Mary Magdalene. She sees the tomb is open and we are told runs right back to the disciples to report that **“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don’t know where they have put him.”** If you follow the history, Mary doesn’t wait to see the angels but runs right back to the disciples eventually to return with them. As the disciples are on their way the other women who had been with Mary, met them and told them about the angels they had seen and even that they had seen and spoken with Jesus who had appeared to them. Everybody assumes the women are just making it all up, because they don’t believe them. Is that because the women do such a bad job of sharing the message? That would account for the various issues we have to deal with. One angel or two? The women see Jesus at the tomb or on the way? Or even the fact that Mark says they said nothing to anyone because they were so afraid.

Then the final sad fact. The women who had seen both Jesus and the angels had been told to tell the disciples to head to Galilee and that there they would see Jesus. Remember, Jesus had told them the same thing, “Go to Galilee!” Again, the women are not very good proclaimers of Jesus because Jesus has to appear to the disciples in a locked room of Jerusalem. They didn’t even attempt to head out to Galilee. I think of all the things I know about this day, that simple fact, is one of the most disturbing acts of unbelief the disciples exhibit. And remember, they are still going to be in the same place a week later!

Perhaps it is the two disciples on the way to Emmaus who help us grasp just what the “belief” of the disciples of Jesus is at this time. They say to Jesus, who is walking with them and talking to them about the events. They say this, **“The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet, mighty in deed and word before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be condemned to death. And they crucified him. But we were hoping that he was going to redeem Israel.”** There it is. They go on and say they heard the report of the women but clearly the women are not believed. And why? Because they had lost hope. When Jesus was crucified they lost hope. When Jesus died, they lost hope. Look at what they say, **“We were hoping…”** That’s past tense. These two disciples and I suspect many of the others, were in such a state that they had abandoned the idea that Jesus was the Son of God.

Well, where are you at in this Christian faith? What is your belief and hope when it comes to Jesus? As time has unfolded or perhaps as life has slapped you across the face have you taken the same attitude of unbelief as these poor disciples did? **“We were hoping…”** I pray that such is not the case. Let’s remind ourselves of the joy and wonder that Jesus is under the theme: **DO NOT BE AFRAID!**

I specifically chose those words as our theme for today. Here is how the angel begins his message to the women. They are alarmed. The tomb is opened and they don’t know where the body of Jesus is. I can understand their fear. They are no doubt thinking that someone, specifically the enemies of Jesus, are clearly out to dishonor the body of Jesus and if they would do that, would it be long before these very same men came after them? Their fear is added to as this angel, this holy, pure and totally Godly being appears before them. No sinner stands before what is holy and pure and is without fear, but the angel is there to help. And his opening words are absolutely wonderful: **“Do not be afraid.”**

Can we truly appreciate the many fears that must have been going through the mind of these disciples of Jesus? Jesus is our hope. But he is dead. We have spent how many years following him, giving up all for him, and he is dead! Clearly Jesus had enemies. He is dead and when are they coming for us? What do we do? How could we be so deceived? Our lives and world is a wreck! Yep, I can understand their fears. Yet they are told, **“Do not be afraid.”** But please be sure you grasp why they were not to be afraid.

**“I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here. He has risen, just as he said.”** Notice the angel gets them to focus on Jesus. You know, the Jesus who was crucified and died. That Jesus is not here. Why? Because he has risen! That means he is alive. He is once again a living, breathing person. Jesus lives. But for me, the kicker is the next words, **“Just as He said.”**

That’s the key, isn’t it! Jesus had told his disciples that he was going to die and then he was coming back to life. Here is this angel clearly telling us that Jesus spoke the truth. That Jesus has indeed accomplished exactly what He said he would. He said he would die. He said he would rise from death. And the fact is, **“just as he said”** Jesus is alive.

Those are important words for me. It is all about God’s Word. It is about the truth and veracity of Jesus! God had promised his Son and God the Father had declared that you would know His Son because his Son would die and come back to life! The sign of Jonah. The sign of the bronze snake! He would live and his life is now the very source of life for sinners. I have been telling you this for years. If someone clearly and absolutely tells you and insist on it, that he is going to die, then rise from the dead, and then he does that, well, you need to listen to that guy! It is all the more important when God’s Word tells us this will happen and it does. Because it all points to Jesus as the Savior, the Son of God who was to come and be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. It is what the Word of God has always been about. Our eternal life and salvation from sin!

There is more that the women will experience on this morning. They are indeed moving away from the tomb and boom there was Jesus. By the way, I want you to think for just a moment about what has changed for the women. Our text tells us in verse 8, **“They hurried away from the tomb, with fear and great joy.”** Love those words. Here is the Holy Spirit giving us insight into the heart of these women. The fear and all it represented is still there but in counterpoint to that fear is now something called **“great joy.”** A new hope is arising. Their sense of despair and anxiousness is being replaced by the birth of this joy. Joy not based on them, but joy based on the words of the angel and their renewed hope in the promises and of Jesus. Could it be, might it be, it must be that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that he still is our Savior!

And there is Jesus! They approach him and recognize nothing of fear is spoken of now. They approach him, bow at his very feet, and they worship him. It really is the only logical thing to do in this circumstance. This Jesus whom you saw brutally die, there he is, standing before you, clearly, absolutely alive. They grab him. They can touch and hold and hug him. (By the way, notice here there is no mention of the wounds from the cross. It is always so interesting to see how those wounds come and go with the need of those who are seeing Jesus!) And then grasp, they worship him.

Jesus right then and there, by these women is lauded and praised, thanked and honored as the mighty, living and powerful Son of God. Everything Jesus has told them is truth. I can’t help but think that Jesus has such wonderful words of encouragement for them. But do notice that the message first starts with important words, **“Do not be afraid.”**

The message of Jesus is the same as that of the angel. First, that is a wonderful reminder to us that heavenly beings all have the same message. That message is about the wonder and marvel of the Savior. That Savior dispels fear. That Savior overcomes fear. Notice I did not say that he helps us do this or shows us how to do this. Fear will not be gone because we rely on ourselves or our own human abilities and strength. If you are going to rely on you, then, I can guarantee that only fear will reign. In the case of this pronouncement of “Do not fear,” note that since Jesus is standing right in front of you, the reason for not fearing is pretty, spectacularly obvious. Jesus is alive!

Jesus is alive. That resurrection proclaims clearly and without doubt the complete truth of God’s salvation. Jesus is alive. There is no doubt, he is God’s Son, the Savior sent to atone for us. The resurrection proves it. Jesus is alive. There is no doubt that he has redeemed us. He has purchased and won us from sin, death and the devil. He has defeated our greatest enemies and worries. He has opened the hope and wonder of the total joy of God’s grace and mercy. God, yes, Jesus, has paid for sin! Forgiveness is ours, because Jesus says so. Eternal life and heaven is ours because Jesus won the victory. You can put your entire hope and soul into the hands of Jesus because sin is atoned for and forgiveness is offered to all who believe in Jesus. Jesus is alive! That means that you and I are given by him, through him, the gift of eternal life. Simply put, He lives, we live! Isn’t that the whole purpose of Jesus? To know there is something better for us to come. There is hope and comfort in the knowledge that heaven is our eternal home. And yes, even though we might physically die and our body be laid to rest for a short time, we are being told our soul will and does go to be with the Lord. We close our eyes in this life to simply open them in eternal life. Life with Jesus. Because he lives. No wonder Jesus says, **“Do not be afraid.”**

I want to encourage you with those words. Yes, it has been some 2,000 plus years since this has all happened, but that does not negate and nullify the truth of God found in Jesus. Honestly, it matters not to me if it is another thousand or even ten-thousand years. Jesus alive, Jesus risen says that I have nothing to fear. He is my Savior. He is your Savior. Trust and cling to him and His Word.

I do feel for the disciples. They don’t do as Jesus says. For that matter, it seems to take them quite a bit of time to finally get to Galilee and be with Jesus. No matter. Because before it is all said and done what is clear is that these men, all the disciples of Jesus, 120 at Pentecost, have come to grasp and understand that Jesus is truly, actually, really, eternally alive. Because they will stop hiding. They will stop being afraid. They will boldly, even to death, proclaim and preach Jesus Christ as God and Lord. It is exactly what they needed in order to become bold, fierce apostles of eternal life and salvation. For that I am grateful. Once they got the truth, they never abandoned it and I can tell you, they were not afraid.

Let us remind ourselves that what was true for them is still true for us today. We don’t have to be afraid. Jesus Lives. Jesus is our Savior. Amen.