

Fear and Joy; Joy and Fear

(Preached at Footscray Baptist Church on Easter Day April 12, 2020 by Cheryl Williams– Matthew 28: 1-10)

Fear – something we all know. Fear does strange things to us. We have seen some of that in recent times – panic buying, fights in supermarkets. Sometimes it causes us to do heroic things. Sometimes it causes us to bunker down. Sometimes it causes us to be depressed or overwhelmed.

The Easter story is peppered with fear. Pilate fears the crowd. Peter fears others knowing his true relationship with Jesus. The other disciples are so scared they flee. Jesus for a moment fears that he has been abandoned by God. The authorities fear what will happen next so are guarding the tomb.

Somehow the women seem to be able to confront their fear. Making their way to the tomb in the early morning – I guess they probably jumped at shadows, kept looking back over their shoulders just in case. Every sound must have sounded ever so loud. Worried no doubt about what they would find, how would they move the stone to tend his body?

And then – the place shook, an earthquake, then an angel – the tough guards shaking in their boots. Well at least they don't have to worry about how they will move the stone.

The first word he says is – don't be afraid. Really!

After that shock he has a message or two for them.

1. I know you seek Jesus, but he is not here, he has been raised. Remember what he told you. Pre-empting their question.
2. Come and I will show where he was.
3. You have a task – go to the disciples and tell them he has been raised and will meet you back in Galilee.

With fear and joy they do as they are asked.

On their way, a voice calls out to them – Greetings.

They take hold of him, they worship him, they have met the risen Lord, fear has turned to joy.

And again, they are told not to be afraid, this time by Jesus. And he confirms the message they are to give the disciples – Go to them and tell them they will see me in Galilee.

Fear has turned to joy.

There gaze has been diverted from the place of death to a place of hope, to a place where they will see their Risen Lord again.

Jesus has appeared to them in their midst of their fear and their grief.

They are given a new task, a mission.

There is continuity and discontinuity, things are the same but different.

There is some kind of reassurance.

Shock, numbness, incomprehension has turned to joy, to peace, to calm.

Henri Nouwen reflecting on what happens to people on that first Easter morning says

- As the women hear his voice, they experience the resurrection in an intimate way. This encounter is not an act done in a spectacular way done to force people to believe, rather it is an event for the friends of Jesus. A word here and the gradual awareness that something new was being born. Everything has remained the same and yet everything has changed.¹
- These appearances are like special favours for friends. They are not done to impress or overwhelm but simply to show that love is stronger than death.²
- This event, initially anyway, is a hidden event. It is not done to baffle opponents or make victory statements or prove he was right all along. Rather it is a sign that love is stronger than death given to those who notice, to those hearing him call their name. It is an event that frees humanity from the shackles of death.³
- This event changes fear to joy. And joy is always about completion. Joy is always about moving from a static place to a new place. Joy is always new, always connected with a movement, with renewal, with rebirth, with change and with life.⁴

This Easter may you be reminded that it is a time of celebration (although we must do that differently this year). Easter is a time to dispel the doubts. Easter is a time bringing reassurance, a time of light breaking through. A time to remember that God is present even if we cannot directly notice that.⁵

Easter is a time to reflect on a loving, surprising and extravagant God. To reflect on a God who brings life out of seemingly impossible situations. To reflect on a God who does meet us in the midst of the everyday – of our everyday fears and doubts. Easter is an event that calls us back to the beginning, back to Galilee to meet Jesus again.

Let us go from here today and live the resurrection – let us bring hope to those in the world that are losing hope – hope that despite fear, turmoil and change, that God is always bringing newness.

¹ p99-100 *'Eternal Seasons – A Liturgical Journey with Henri Nouwen'* edited by Michael Ford, Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, London, 2004. Pp 99-100. This part taken from 'The Road to Daybreak' by H. Nouwen

² Ibid, pp 98-99. This part taken from 'A Cry for Mercy' by H. Nouwen

³ Ibid. This part taken from 'Bread for the Journey' by H. Nouwen

⁴ Ibid. This part taken from 'In the House of the Lord' by H. Nouwen

⁵ Ibid. p. 97

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This story is central to our faith.

May God greet you gently.

May God call you back to Galilee to meet him again.

May God meet you in the midst of your fears, your confusion, your doubt and call you by name.

May God continue to surprise you.

May you know God's love for you and for the world.

May you know new life, new life in all its fullness.

May you know joy. Amen.