

With Fear and Awe

Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church on April 4th 2021 – Mark 14:51 – 15: 47)

Fear, an emotion we have all felt. It makes you nauseous, you feel it in the pit of your stomach. I once lost a client on an outing in the hills, and had to call the police after search frantically. I was most fearful of having to tell the office, all turned out okay, she had gone to the toilet and then walked out a different entrance and got disorientated. Many things make us fearful – a new challenge or job, flying, a health scare, footsteps behind us on a dark night. I can only imagine the fear asylum seekers experience on a leaky boat in the middle of the ocean, or the fear of people living in Myanmar at the moment.

Fear is something we know and it can produce absolute terror, it can paralyse or cause us to fight or flee.

The events of Good Friday, filled with terror, would have produced absolute fear and terror in the lives of Jesus' friends. No wonder most fled the scene. Arrest by stealth, betrayal, denial and public humiliation would have terrified the strongest person. Such failure would have sent any one to ground.

It is then amazing, that three women should show such courage in making their way to the tomb, albeit at sunrise. As they walked along, I wonder what they were thinking. Were they looking over their shoulder all the time? Was every noise near a bush louder and more fearsome than normal? We are told they are worried about how to move the stone. When they arrived and saw the stone rolled away, whilst being curious, I am sure they were filled with terror – who had done this? And more importantly, why? No wonder they were alarmed when they entered the tomb. I am not sure I would have gone in at all! I think I would have made a run for it, with conspiracy theories racing around in my head. I would have been concerned about the young man, what was he doing there? What might he be about to do to them? And where was the body – was this the wrong grave? Is this someone's idea of a bad joke? Had the authorities moved his body? As some bizarre joke, had someone stolen the body? And then the young man speaks – did they want to hear what he had to say? Or did they want to make a run for it?

Their courage and wanting to perform an act of a loving service to their friend, so quickly, has turned to terror again, terror like they might have felt on Good Friday.

The young man – who is he? Is he the same young man who fled the garden at the arrest? He then pre-empts their question – are you looking for Jesus of Nazareth, the one they crucified? He tells them he has been raised, that being the case, obviously, he is not here anymore. He tells them to come and look and see the proof. No doubt many thoughts are racing through their heads at that point. But the young man hasn't finished speaking yet, he has a message for them – they must go and tell the disciples **and Peter** that Jesus is going ahead of them to Galilee and they must meet him there.

The women fled and kept silent because they were so afraid, that is how the earliest versions of this story end. I too would have fled and kept silent, at least initially, until I could think it through and make some sense of it all.

The women were seized by fear and amazement. Fear and amazement characterise the whole Easter story. Pilate fears the crowd, Peter fears others knowing about his relationship with Jesus, his friends flee the garden in fear, Jesus on the cross fears what

comes next. However, amazingly some women have the courage to go to back to his graveside. Amazingly, it is the women who hear the news that He is risen, first, and are given a task to do. Amazingly the message is to go back to Galilee where it all began and meet Jesus again.

So, what has it all been about? Something happened that first Easter morning and nothing was the same again. We know that Jesus did meet with his disciples again at various times and in various places. It seems to me as I read this story in Mark that ends so abruptly, that the important part of the story, isn't the empty tomb or the miracle of raising Jesus, but an encounter with Jesus. The message is for the disciples to go back to Galilee, back to where it all had started and meet Jesus again. It is the encounter with the risen Jesus, the one who loves them despite their denial, despite their fleeing, despite their silence that makes a difference. They are called gain to follow Jesus despite what they have or haven't done.

And that it's the message for us too. Get up, go back to Galilee and meet Jesus there. The point of the resurrection is to meet with the risen Jesus. The point of the resurrection is to follow Jesus again. Easter takes us back again to the beginning, back to Galilee. Back to a new beginning. Easter takes us back to meet Jesus again for the very first time.

So, let us leave this day with a new vigour to follow Jesus back to Galilee and as we read the gospel story again, let us see his life in the light of the Resurrection. Let us encounter this Jesus again and again. Let us renew our commitment to the one who gave up his life in order that we might live, really live. Amen.