

Hear the Good News! – Rev. Dr. Alan Dorway

Matthew 28:1-10

April 12, 2020

Easter Sunday

When I was in college, I took a lifeguarding certification class to work at the rec pool. There were about 10 people in our class and we had a very loud teacher. Like you could hear her voice underwater. We did the standard lifeguard things like swim laps, tread water while holding a brick, brush up on first aid and CPR, and learn how to safely help a distressed swimmer.

A distressed swimmer is dangerous, because when we are scared, we grab or hold on to anything we think can help us. Yet grabbing a lifeguard can be harmful to both people.

We learned an escape technique and practiced with a partner.

In the water, the plan was to swim up close to our partner, have them grab on to us, and then escape. I grabbed my partner and he escaped. When it was my turn, my partner grabbed the top of my head and I did not get a proper breath. Okay, I did not panic, but did the escape method. It did not work. Okay, try again. Nothing.

This was getting serious, so I tapped my partners leg to let me go and we'd try again. He must not have felt this tap and I started to squirm a little. Tried one more time and then I began to worry.

When I heard my lifeguard teacher yell, let him go.

I may have taken the biggest breath of my life when I was released and came to the surface. I was frustrated and not pleased. My teacher was yelling, why did you not tap to release? Head to the side and catch your breath.

I kept on re-playing the drill in my mind and felt embarrassed. I was the only one who did not complete the task. I sat on the side of the pool and watched as the class finished and hit the showers. My mind began to tell spiral and I knew I did not want to fail. For this brief moment, negative thoughts started to push me under worse than the drill.

I stood up to leave and our instructor told me to wait. She came over to me and I prepared to get a stern talking. Her tone surprised me as she said, it's okay. Today was just a bad day. Understand?

I nodded. Good news is we practice again tomorrow, see you then.

I was not going to be dropped from the program? No.

I had more to learn and to eventually complete the certification.

I have made plenty of mistakes throughout my life and I know I will make more. I have disappointed myself and others and no doubt will do it again. I don't want to. I want every idea, action, and plan work. I want to be recognized and known for being confident, competent, and a great person.

But, for every idea or task I feel like I've dropped the ball, in the back of my mind, fear can build up and chip away at my confidence and creativity for future endeavors.

We've all made mistakes and more will come. We've been disappointed and hurt others. We want to be good at everything we try, especially in those areas we know we can excel at. We are confident one moment and out of our league the next and this is life. We know it, yet there are places in our lives where we are almost paralyzed by inactivity because of past failures and present fear.

We have wanted to take a breath, just once before a trial or test, but we've not been able to do so. We have put our education and practice into effect, only to remain stuck.

We've been told to get out of the water, stay in our own lane, keep our nose in our own business, and pondered our self-worth. We've come face to face with depression, stripped confidence, lack of empathy, anger at ourselves, and feelings of hopelessness.

At times, we have died a little or had parts of our heart taken away not by our own doing and this feels worse than death, but then death comes along reminding us of deep questions as we stare into the void of the unknown.

The disciples, the women, and those who had been with Jesus over his ministry woke up today. They reviewed in their minds the previous couple of days. They may have been in shock.

They may have wondered what to do. Potentially, their faith was shattered as Jesus did not live up to their expectations. They could have been slowly coming to grips their messiah, the one they loved and followed, was buried behind a stone in a tomb.

One thing was certain, Jesus was dead. In the gospel of Matthew, the two Mary's were coming to look at the tomb. They knew guards were there and any chance of rolling the stone away seemed futile. When suddenly, there was an earthquake and an angel of the Lord came from heaven, rolled away the stone for a chair, and had the appearance of lightening.

This is so bizarre, the guards went full possum.

The women may have been close to this as well, when the angel said, bingo, you got it right! You passed the test, figured out the riddle to eternal life, rose to the challenge, and have paved the way for generations to work their way into God's favor.

Now, go and tell the others about this and get on moving to your final destination of Galilee where all will make sense.

We know that's not what the angel said. He shared good news with the women and told them to get the crew together and head to Galilee. No, he did not do that either.

The angel's first words were do not be afraid.
Only after they were told, do not be afraid, could they hear good news.

Even Jesus said, do not be afraid.
Then they could hear the good news.

We all want good news.

In life we want the good news we passed, we succeeded, we accomplished, we are right, we've worked hard, or we've attained the degree.

Good news comes with victories, celebrations, and pats on the back. Good news is learning the answer about when will we get back to normal. We hope good news eases pain, covers frustration, and guides us another step.

We talk about good news because that's what followers of Jesus talk about. We know good news is supposed to help us, strengthen us, and allow us to persevere. Good news is what the gospels are about and covers everything Jesus did.

Yet, I'm a pastor, and even to my ears, good news, just saying those words can fall flat.

We believe Jesus is Lord, we are grateful for God's grace, and the Holy Spirit empowers us with agape love.

But. But life can be hard and just saying good news does not change that. We have questions that do not go away just because someone said good news and that makes it all better. Life happens and there are plenty of times when the water is over our heads.
All we want is a breath, let alone breathe in this good news everyone talks about.

Maybe this Easter we need to hear it in reverse.
Do not be afraid and then good news.
Do not be afraid Mary, what Jesus said took place, see look at where he was buried.
Do not be afraid Mary, see Jesus is not here, he is alive.

Do not be afraid, what is impossible with humanity is possible with God.

Do not be afraid, death does not have the final word. Yes, it may not make sense, but don't overthink, stress, or worry, do not be afraid. Now go tell the others.

In verse 8, the women did not run back with a theological epiphany, it did not make sense. We are told, they left quickly with fear and great joy, and they ran. They may not have even run in the right direction, but that's okay, death being overcome, Jesus not where he's supposed to be, is a crazy thing.

Again, suddenly, they find Jesus and they worshipped. They did not need to think. They didn't need a rationale answer. They knew it was Jesus and they worshipped.

Still Jesus said, do not be afraid. Do not be afraid, I'm not leaving. Do not be afraid, I'm with you. Do not be afraid, go and tell the others this crazy, good news that I am is alive.

This Easter, I pray we all hear good news. We need good news in our lives. The good news of Jesus taking the sins of the world. Good news of forgiveness. Good news of being justified as humans who are imperfect and cannot do extra work credit to change that. Good news of Jesus rising from the dead as living proof of God's amazing love for all of us, as a gift, forever. That is good news.

Yet, do not be afraid. Hear that as well.

Do not be afraid is good news.

Do not be afraid. Our past failures and sin do not define us.

Do not be afraid. Shame has no power over us.

Do not be afraid. God loves us and sent his son at the right time for us.

Do not be afraid. We are not judged, graded, or made worthy by what others think.

Do not be afraid. There is justice and mercy and all things will be redeemed and reconciled by the Holy Spirit.

Do not be afraid. We are not alone.

Do not be afraid. Jesus is alive.

Do not be afraid. The tomb is empty. Jesus is alive.

Do not be afraid. He is risen. Tell others.

Do not be afraid. He is risen.

Do not be afraid. He is risen indeed.

Do not be afraid. Amen.

One: Christ is Risen!

All: He is Risen Indeed!

One: Christ is Risen!

All: He is Risen Indeed, Alleluia, Amen!

The First Presbyterian Church of Everett wishes you joy this Easter!