

Pastor Adrienne Meier
April 5, 2026, Resurrection of our Lord
Saint Thomas Evangelical Lutheran Church, Bloomington, Indiana

The Last Word

Matthew 28:1-10

After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. The angel's appearance was like lightning and its clothing white as snow. For fear of the angel the guards shook and became like dead people. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my siblings to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Nearly every time an angel shows up in the Bible they start with the same line, "Do not be afraid." I'd like to think maybe they'd learn—you know, change their tactics a little bit. Maybe don't sneak up on people. Give them a little warning, but not too much—the earthquake was probably overkill. Though, maybe they say, "Do not be afraid" to kind of hedge their bets about their message. A kind of, "Please don't freak out, but..." Because, in the end, the message angels bring can be truly terrifying, asking us to take major risks in our lives. They know that they ask us not to be afraid, but the heart of the message most often is, really, "Do not let fear be the last word."

Yet, for all my talk of changing tactics, I have to give the angel credit for scaring seasoned soldiers into a stupor and clearing the way for the women to arrive, unannounced and unnoticed, at the tomb.

And the women. Of course, they arrive at the tomb afraid. They couldn't *not* be here—they had been with Jesus through his ministry, they had been with him at the cross. But, on this morning, they were still afraid. Whether they knew about the guards posted at the tomb or not, they knew it was risky to be anywhere near the body of someone who had been crucified by the state for sedition. The authorities would be looking for co-conspirators. The women were also afraid because whatever the Jesus-movement had been, whatever hope it had been for them, it looked like it had come to an end. The future was completely unknown, now. On Friday, fear and death had had the last word.

Like those women at Jesus' tomb, I, myself, am afraid, these days. Afraid of the future. Afraid of war. Afraid of the rising cost of everything. Afraid of the world my children will inherit, let alone the generations that will follow them. I'm afraid for my neighbors, day after day swallowing the bitter pill of unwantedness—a daily dose of unwelcomeness. I'm afraid for the planet. I'm afraid of the algorithm, of what we're fed with our endless diet of screen and scroll. I'm afraid of dying, and I'm afraid of my fear of dying, how that particular avoidance threatens to consume my days. I'm afraid of missing something, too—if I'm honest—afraid of all the ways that fear has locked me, paralyzed me into inaction. All the ways it has the last word in my life.

It is interesting the only time Matthew actually says the women were afraid—as opposed to someone telling them *not* to be afraid—was when they left the tomb. They were the very first witnesses to something remarkable and *now* Matthew says they were afraid—not of the soldiers, not of being punished, but of the miracle of the resurrection. Rome, the religious authorities, this was a fear they already knew. But the resurrection? That leaves them vulnerable. This isn't a feeling that is going to get resolved soon. They're in the midst of a life-changing event, and not just their lives, but it's a life-on-earth-changing event. What would it mean for something other than death and fear to have the last word?

So, when they run smack-dab into the resurrected Jesus, I hear his “Do not be afraid,” words not like, coaching them down from their panic, but encouraging them not to let fear have the last word. Encouraging them to be vulnerable, and then to leverage that vulnerability into courage, into hope, so that they are not just witnesses to some past event—Jesus's life and death—but to the future hope inaugurated by his resurrection. This is what drops them to their knees in worship, in spite of their fear, a word of joy on their lips.

We are living through an intense moment of fear and uncertainty. And most of us—most of us, but not all—enjoy a good deal of safety, even still. We are far from the earthshaking bombs. No unexploded missiles have become a startling feature of our children's playground. Many of us enjoy the security of generations of citizenship, and, while our prescriptions may be expensive, no law has been passed to prevent us from filling them. But, as Christians, we refuse to be unaffected by fear, we refuse to be unaffected by our neighbors' fear. We refuse to let fear have the last word. We refuse to get bogged down with “Look what the world is coming to,” because we have something bolder, and more courageous to say: “Look what has come into the world!”

Like the women, Beloved, our fear doesn't stop us. We gather to worship with pounding hearts and tangled-up guts. We express in our worship the honest reality of the world. But we refuse to let fear—any more than sin and death—be the last word in our lives. We join their bold witness, a statement of hope that echoes—past, present, and future. The last word is not fear, it is: Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed. Alleluia!

Amen.