

Easter Day A, 2011

Text: Matthew 28:1-10

Title: Running

+ INI +

Alleluia, Christ is Risen!

When is the last time that you ran?

When is the last time that you just took off at a full sprint, as fast as you could possibly go?

I'm not talking about running a race, or playing a sport, but unplanned, spontaneous running. You just took off running.

We don't run, or even walk that much anymore. Usually we drive. So when was the last time that you drove as quickly as you could, without any regard to the speed limit?

Speaking for myself, I typically only run in the case of emergencies. I run to grab Zachary before he topples down the stair or grabs something sharp. I rush to the hospital when someone is near death. I get in a hurry when I'm late. But usually, I take the slow and steady approach.

I honestly can't remember the last time I ran for a good reason, that I ran because I had good news to share, and I was so excited I just couldn't wait.

Children are the opposite. Children run all the time. Little kids run everywhere. They run to pick up a toy or explore somewhere new. They run to greet mom and dad or grandma and grandpa. They run just for the sheer joy of running, laughing and giggling all the way.

There's lots of running going on on Easter morning. Easter is a time to run, even for adults.

This morning, the women run to tell the disciples about their encounter with the angels. They don't walk, they don't stroll or even jog. The women ran.

Matthew tells us that there were two reasons why the women ran. They were filled with fear and they were filled with great joy. This is why they ran.

How about you?

Are you filled with fear this morning? Are you filled with great joy?

First, the fear.

There are several reasons why the women might have been afraid.

It could have been the angels.

Seeing angels face to face is always a fearful thing. Matthew tells us a little about this angel. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.

Look what happened to the guards. They completely passed out from the shock of seeing the angel. They became like dead men. These were no sissies. These were professional soldiers. And they could not stand in the presence of the angel.

The first words out of the angel's mouth were "Fear not." These are the same words the angels spoke to Zechariah, to Mary and Joseph, and to the shepherd at Christmas. Do not be afraid.

But the presence of angels probably wasn't the only reason why the women were afraid.

The resurrection itself is a fearful thing.

Have you ever met someone who was raised from the dead?

The mere thought of such a thing is frightening. It goes against everything we know about this life. Zombies are the thing of horror stories and nightmares. When someone dies, we don't expect to see them again.

Even if you love and miss someone who died, it would be at least a little frightening to see them alive again.

But the resurrection of Jesus is an even more frightening thing, because it proves once and for all who Jesus is.

Jesus Christ is much more than a nice guy, a helpful person, or a good teacher. Jesus Christ is the Lord God of heaven and earth. He is more powerful even than death itself.

Imagine what it would be like to realize for the first time who Jesus really is, and that you are going to see Him, that you will be face to face with the all-powerful, almighty God.

Consider the women's reaction when they meet Jesus. They fall down before Him and hold onto His feet.

They are afraid of Jesus. They are too terrified even to stand in His presence.

And they should be. Jesus is the Lord God. They are poor sinners, like you and me.

When you come to church, you should be at least a little afraid. You are coming into Jesus' presence. He is holy, perfect, righteous. You are not. You are soiled with sin, you have sinned in thought, word, and deed.

But Jesus' first words to the women are words of forgiveness and absolution. Jesus says, "Do not be afraid." Don't be afraid of me. I have not come to punish you or chastise you. You do not need to be afraid of me.

Those are the words Jesus speaks to you, too. Don't be afraid. Don't run away out of fear. Jesus comes today not to punish you but to forgive you.

So when the women's fear is gone, all that is left is joy. Remember when the women ran, it was for two reasons- fear and joy. Now only joy remains.

Imagine the joy that these women must have felt. They came to the tomb that morning expecting to find a corpse. They came looking for a dead body to wrap with spices.

Instead, they found an angel, and then their risen Jesus.

Jesus has conquered death. He has put an end to the permanence of death.

Death is your last great enemy. Even though people may tell you otherwise, death is not natural. Death is not a good thing.

Death is painful and gut wrenching. You can try to dress up death with makeup and flowers, but that cannot hide its true ugliness.

Jesus' resurrection means that death, too will die. Life wins.

One day you will die. Your heart will stop, your body will waste away and your friends will cry.

But that will not be the end for you. You have been joined to Jesus Christ in Your Baptism. You have eaten His risen body and drank His risen blood. You are a part of Him. Death could not hold Him, and so death cannot you who belong to Him.

When Christ returns, you will rise from the dead, just as Jesus rose on Easter morning. You will share in Jesus' victory over death.

That's good news. That's joyful news. That's the kind of news worth running about.

So follow the example of the women and run. Run to tell the world that Jesus is risen, that life lives again, and that we all now have the hope of eternal life.

Be like a child today. Don't be afraid of what other people might think or how they might react, but live in the joy of the resurrection, the life that will never end.

Run if you can. Use your phone, facebook, e-mail, whatever you can to share this same joy.

Alleluia, Christ is Risen!