

Age Of High Anxiety

Presented by Pastor Scott Walters on 04-12-20

At Crossroads United Methodist Church

Waunakee, WI

Today is Easter Sunday. It is perhaps the crowning day of the year in the life of the church – no matter what denomination (or non-denomination) you're part of.

This morning is the first in a 5-part sermon series called "Unafraid." This series is intended to help us live with courage and hope in a time of uncertainty and great anxiety.

Isaiah 41:10 is our theme Scripture, which begins, "Don't fear, because I am with you; don't be afraid, for I am your God"

Today's message focuses on the importance of faith as the means of living a life unafraid.

[Prayer]

I anticipate certain things on Easter:

I anticipate the energy, the excitement, the people, the children, those arriving late.

On Easter Sunday: I anticipate the music, the anthems, the solos, And, truth be told, on Easter, I want to know that God has the whole world in his arms.

To quote Martin Luther King, "I want to know that the arc of the universe bends toward justice."

I want to believe that I will be a little less self-absorbed and periodically inconsiderate.

I want to know that the people I love who have died are now nestled safely in God's arms.

I want to know that Jesus not only came into the world and lived and died– but that the tomb is now empty, the stone rolled, his body gone, because he has been raised just as he said.

As I count it, this is my 39th Easter Sunday as a pastor, being appointed to serve a local church – IT'S UNIQUE -- DIFFERENT FOR ALL OF US.

With Coronavirus everything is different. [unemployed, uninsured,

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furloughed]

A parishioner made a very perceptive comment in a Bible Study that, to her surprise, Easter seems much more filled with fear and anxiety than it does joy.

Another Gospel talks about Easter evening and how the disciples locked themselves up and hid for fear of the authorities. (Now, there's an example of social distancing!!!)

But the word of the messenger is still there: "Do not be afraid."
140 times= "Do not be afraid," or "Fear not."

I'm struck that "fear" is mentioned four times in these short ten verses. In Matthew's account, the women witness an earthquake,
an angel appearing,
and the stone being rolled away.

Even Jesus, at one point says, "Do not be afraid." which says to me that maybe there's something to be afraid of.

I don't blame them for being frightened. We can read about these events calmly, but I can only imagine that fear was the natural response.

Matthew says that women left the tomb quickly, "with fear and great joy." I love that phrase.

Maybe they don't quite reach the "not afraid" that the messenger and Jesus are leading them toward – but they seem to take strength and comfort in the fact that what's happening is meant to fill them with joy, not fear, and so while they're still afraid, they lean into and take action on the joy.

And the joy keeps them moving, ready to share this amazing news:

Jesus is not dead. The tomb was not the final word after all. Anxiety did not end this story. Jesus is alive, and he's going to meet you again, soon.

Maybe the women's experience of Fear AND Joy is what Easter is all about – at least today – at least this year.

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Resurrection lays aside our need for certainty and instead offers us a promise of God's reality:

A world filled with courage—a world where teams of cleaners and cashiers and food delivery persons and CNA's and EMT's and First Responders and health care personnel put themselves on the line for those whose names they may not even know.

Easter asks us to set aside our past defeats and try again. For God knows and sees more than we can ever ask or imagine.

Easter moves us beyond fear.

Easter is more than heavenly messengers and more than earthquakes and fainting guards.

Resurrection is a way of being and a way of life.

The sins of humanity no longer have the final say.

Resurrection means there is always something more. Resurrection means—we do not have to be afraid. -- “Fear not!”

For you see, Easter doesn't end for us at the empty tomb. After all, we, like the women, are looking for Jesus, and he isn't in the tomb anymore.

He's not in this place where death has the last word and fear will knock you off your feet. He's going on ahead. And he's him.

Let's go: maybe with some fear. But with great joy that's transforming fear into courage.

For the stone is rolled, the tomb is bare, he is not there, He is risen.

Alleluia Christ is Risen,
The lord is Risen indeed!

inviting us to come with