

The joy that overcomes the fear
[Matthew 28:1-10](#)

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I will never forget when Wendy, my colleague and good friend in graduate school, gave birth to her first baby. Wendy had defended her Ph.D just a few weeks before, and I remember getting the call that Jason had arrived and making my way to the hospital to see this new person who had entered her life. This was the first close friend of mine who had a baby. Jason was so small and his parents, Wendy and her husband James were delighted – just brimming with joy. But there was something else. Both Wendy and her husband, James, seemed a little shaken and then they began to talk about it. During the birth, they had had a scare where James was asked to leave the room. The doctor was able to right what was wrong and Jason was born just fine. I have found that this is fairly common – a birth of a new baby is a time of great joy which is often accompanied by fear whether it is from some difficulty with the birth or the huge task of taking a newborn home for the first time.

I heard a similar mix of fear and joy in our gospel this morning. At dawn, Mary Magdalene and Mary have come to the tomb of Jesus. And there is an earthquake because an angel of the Lord has come down from heaven and rolled away the stone. The guard are so scared they fall on the ground shaking. The angel says he knows they are looking for Jesus Christ and that he is not here because he has been raised from the dead. Look the tomb is empty but go and tell the disciples that Jesus is risen and that he is going ahead of them into Galilee. The scripture says, “So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.”

Fear is right. I can barely imagine what it would be like to go to the tomb of a beloved teacher and friend to have it shaken open and an angel of the Lord appear in dazzling white clothes. The women do well, because they are still standing while the guards are frozen like dead men. And amidst all the fear, there is joy. Could it be? Could Jesus have risen? His tomb is empty and he will meet us? Could what Jesus told us about rising from the dead have been true. The women go to tell the disciples and Jesus appears to them and says Greetings! It doesn't say this in the scripture, but I can only imagine that their joy must have been so great at that moment. The women worship him and hold on to his feet. Jesus gives them the same direction as the angel. Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers that they will see me in Galilee.

Fear and great joy - Isn't that the case with so many things in life? For example, graduation to middle school, high school or college. Great joy at getting to that next step in life and yet fear from taking up new classes and finding new friends. Getting that first job – Great joy of finally have a salary but fear in wondering whether you can truly live up to all that is asked. Sometimes the fear comes first – fear in facing a difficult prognosis for a loved one, but then realizing the joy in the gift they are to us that we wouldn't trade for the world. Sometimes the fear is so great it overcomes us and we become like the guards in the gospel – frozen as if we are dead, completely without hope never mind joy.

I wonder if the women were not as afraid as the guards because they knew Jesus and they knew what Jesus had taught and that prepared them to hear what the angel said, to recognize that something amazing was happen. Knowing Jesus brought them to the joy. And then the presence of Jesus brought them to even more joy and they overcame their fear and went out to proclaim

the Good News that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. In his rising Jesus has conquered death and we have the assurance that good not evil will have the last word.

We may not have been there that morning, but we have the witness of those two Marys – the witness that began when they went to tell the disciples that Jesus has risen and that witness has come to us over the course of 2000 years. It is the witness of the resurrection of Jesus Christ which “creates the possibility for joy and hope and courage and so much more. Why? Because it changes everything. In the resurrection, you see, we have God’s promise that life is stronger than death, that love is greater than hate, that mercy overcomes judgment, and that all the sufferings and difficulties of this life are transient -- real and palpable and sometimes painful, for sure, but they do not have the last word and do not represent the final reality.”¹

So what do we do in our lives when the fear gets overwhelming and the joy and hope seem oh so far away? I found myself in that place this past Thursday – Maundy Thursday. Early in the day, I got the news that a colleague and a friend had been found dead. I grieved for him on hearing this news not just because this was his wife of only 8 months and because of the circumstances, but also because 5 years ago he lost his first wife of many many years due to an aneurysm. To have his second wife die, the one who had brought him so much joy after the death of his first seemed so cruel. And then I heard the US had bombed Afghanistan and my despair grew deeper. What would this mean? How many innocent people had been killed? Would this mean war? How many of our young men and women would now be called up to fight? And so my despair deepened. But especially because it was Holy Week and especially because I was thinking about the resurrection, there was a small spark of hope inside me because I truly believe that life will conquer death and that love is stronger than hate and that when Jesus is with us, we can find hope and joy even in the midst of great fear and despair.

So my prayer for my friend will be that Jesus will be with him and will show him a way forward. I will pray the same for myself and this world as we continue to face so much unrest and struggle in our world. This is our work my friends. We do this work by offering a helping hand, by listening to another in pain and by sharing our story of how resurrection is present in our lives. Because we have heard the story of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we too are witnesses. We too are witnesses that life will conquer death, hope despair and even in the midst of great fear, we can find a way forward. So go forth and proclaim even in the midst of fear, that Jesus Christ is with us, that he has conquered death and even now is bringing new life and hope into this world.

¹ David Lose, Wednesday, April 16, 2014, <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=3174>