

**Second Sunday of Easter**  
**April 11, 2018**  
**John 20:19-31**  
**“Fear is a terrible thing”**

It is a troubled room there in Jerusalem in John’s gospel reading this day. More than several years ago, The Saturday Evening Post (which believe it or not ... is still in publication as a quarterly magazine) ran a cartoon showing a man about to be rescued after he had spent a long-time ship-wrecked on a tiny deserted island.

The sailor in charge of the rescue team stepped onto the beach and handed the man a stack of newspapers. “Compliments of the Captain,” the sailor said. “He would like you to glance at the headlines to see if you’d still like to be rescued!” (James W. Moore, Some Things Are Too Good Not To Be True, Dimensions, 1994, p. 80)

**PAUSE**

Perhaps those friends of Jesus can identify with that story – Mary Magdalene has told them that Jesus’ tomb is empty – that must be confusing enough but she also told them that the risen Christ had spoken to her!

Sometimes the headlines do scare us. Sometimes we feel that evil is winning. Sometimes everything scares us.

It is a troubled room there in Jerusalem in John’s gospel reading this day.

They were afraid; they could be next to be crucified themselves; what ever is HE going to say to them?

FEAR has paralyzed them.

Dr. Phillip McGraw, popularly known as Dr. Phil on his daily talk show, helps people get their lives together. Our everyday choices, says Dr. Phil, separate the sane and successful from the frustrated and failing. “The important thing to understand,” he concludes, “is that the number one catalyst in the choices we make is FEAR.”

Louis Pasteur is reported to have had such an irrational fear of dirt and infection that he refused to shake hands with anyone.

President and Mrs. Benjamin Harrison were so intimidated by the newfangled electricity installed in the White House they didn’t dare touch the switches. If there were no servants around to turn off the lights when the Harrisons went to bed, they slept with them on.

Fear comes in many forms. The number one problem that causes many of us to make wrong choices is that we are afraid--afraid of what our friends will think, afraid of ridicule, afraid of failing, afraid of speaking in public, afraid of being found out, afraid of starting a new life, afraid of leaving the comfort of the routine, afraid of being hurt, afraid of ... and you can fill in the blank!

Advice columnist Ann Landers received over **10,000 letters a day** before her death in 2002. Once when she was asked what the most common problem people write about, without hesitation she said "Fear."

FEAR is a paralyzing emotion.

The disciples of Jesus have given themselves over to fear. It is keeping them indoors, locked away behind closed doors, unable to carry out their mission, unable to even contemplate the future ... their beloved leader has left them ... in the lurch as far as they are concerned.

He was everything to them ... their leader, their friend, their guide, their hope, their healer, just everything to them.

And he is dead, but perhaps he isn't. Mary Magdalene claims to have seen him and that he spoke to her.

But John's gospel tells that their fear was misplaced.

Instead of condemnation there was just the greeting of peace – shalom – peace be with you.

Easter comes to remind us that there is no grave deep enough, no seal imposing enough, no stone heavy enough, no evil strong enough to keep Christ in the grave.

And when released from the bounds of death there is strangely to his disciples and probably just as strange to us no recriminations for us.

None of:

Why did you leave me?

Why do you make the lousy decision you do?

Why are you so afraid of everything?

What were you thinking?

Instead:

Peace and holiness be with you!

Robert Strand, in his book, Epecially, for the Hurting Heart, has a wonderful discussion what this really means for us – it is Christ saying to us "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you!"

Strand asks, "What ever does the word **never** mean?" He notes that in the original language "never" is really a compounding of five negatives. Not that each negative is added to another. Rather, each negative is multiplied by the other. According to Strand, it really should read, "***I will never, no, not ever, no never leave you or forsake you!***"

It is a synergistic compounding negative. It's a **forever never** which means no exceptions!

He then speaks of the meaning of **leave**? In the original Greek leave means "to leave behind, to abandon, to give up on, to send back." So far, our then the meaning of God's message to us is: "***I will never, no not ever, no never leave you behind, abandon you, give up on you, or send you back!***"

The meaning of forsake in Biblical Greek means, "to leave one in a helpless state, to disregard." It also can be further expanded to include "not relaxing my watchfulness over you."

To this point, then, God's message, in the full, amplified version reads: ***"I will never, no not ever, no never give up on you, abandon you, leave you behind, cause you not to survive, leave you helpless, nor shall I ever relax concerning keeping my presence with you!"***

In other words, we can give up on the fear aspect of relating to God – relax. God will always be there for us.

Fear is a paralyzing emotion, it can suck the energy out of a person, a group, even a church.

We fear change, we fear not changing, we fear losing a leader, we fear getting a new leader ...

But the story of the Resurrection is that we no longer have to fear, fear death, fear life, fear change, fear .... And you can fill in the blank with examples from your own lives.

But God's message to us: ***"I will never, no not ever, no never give up on you, abandon you, leave you behind, cause you not to survive, leave you helpless, nor shall I ever relax concerning keeping my presence with you!"***

On that we can count.

*Randy Dunnavant*