

Angela Pound

Easter Sunday / Matthew 28:1–15

Have you ever noticed how obsessed we are with fear? Fear, it's all around us.

We package it. Stream it. Compete with it.

Do you remember the show *Fear Factor from the early 2000s?*

People would jump off helicopters, lie in tanks of snakes, eat the unthinkable—just to prove they could beat fear.

And people watched. Every week. Why?

Because fear is *entertaining*... until it's *real*.

And out here—in real life—fear isn't a game.

It's the silent pressure behind our anxiety.

The whisper that says, *You'll never be good enough.*

It's the heavy feeling in your chest when life spins out of control.

It's the voice that says, *You're alone. You're stuck. You're too far gone.*

And the truth is, we don't just face fear—we live in it.

The youth just talked about FOMO, the fear of missing out, something we see more and more often with youth, but while we talk about it and research it's affect on youth, in reality, as adults we have all experienced FOMO in our lives. We've either heard about an event that some of our friends are at, but we didn't know about it. Or a colleague got a promotion when we didn't even know about the opportunity. Or many of your friends and/or family are heading out on their vacations away, and you're stuck working. Or, maybe it is to do with your children or grandchildren, when you see all the cool extracurricular activities other kids are involved in and you feel like your own are missing out. Or that couple that just bought a beautiful home in a trendy neighborhood, while you haven't found what you're looking for, or you don't have the latest, cool, tech gadget that others are talking about. Maybe it was the latest crypto venture that others seem to have benefitted from while you weren't involved.

As we heard in Scripture from Matthew 28:1-10 the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid.” Can you imagine? There is an earthquake and an angel whose appearance was like lightning and clothing white as snow is descending from heaven. The guards shook and became like dead men. Wouldn’t you be afraid? Put yourself in the two Mary’s shoes. Visualize what that scene would look like, guards who were once upright now become like dead. The stone has been rolled away from the tomb and Jesus isn’t there. The Marys have gone to the tomb to anoint Jesus’ body with spices, as was the custom after the Sabbath, but he isn’t there. They have been told Jesus is raised from the dead and that they will see him in Galilee. Would you have fully believed the angel at this point? Would you be leaving quickly to go tell the others what you have seen, hoping they believe you, but not knowing what to do with the information. Do you even believe it? What does this all mean? Do you think they fully fathomed what this all meant? It says, they leave with fear and great joy to tell the disciples, when they meet Jesus on the way. They had joy, but they still had fear. After Jesus greets the women he says, “Do not be afraid.” They now hear from Jesus himself, do not be afraid.

Fear is a powerful emotion, often rooted in the unknown or the unexpected. In our world today, it frequently shows up as FOMO, a constant anxiety that we’re being left behind or left out, especially in a world filled with filtered highlights and endless scrolling. But when the angel says to Mary, “Do not be afraid,” it’s a reminder that in the midst of fear, uncertainty, or even overwhelming change, God offers peace. The resurrection of Jesus wasn’t just good news—it was *the* news, and Mary didn’t miss it. She was there, present, chosen, and called. In Christ, we’re not missing out—we’re invited in.

Here is the good news:

Easter breaks that fear.

(Pause. Let that land. Then shift tone—more hopeful.) Let me say that again, Easter breaks that fear.

When Jesus walked out of the tomb,
He crushed the final fear—the one none of us could escape: death.

And in its place, He gave us something the world can’t fake or fabricate:

Hope. Living, breathing, fearless hope.

If you remember back to Christmas just a few months ago, we saw in Scripture when individuals were told to Not Be Afraid. The angel telling both Zechariah and Mary, “Do not be afraid,” and later the angel telling the shepherds the same thing. A message spoken in moments of uncertainty and awe, but the words of “Do not fear” were an invitation to embrace the unknown. Mary was afraid of being chosen for such a big role as the mother of the Messiah. Zechariah was afraid of the message of his son’s birth. The shepherds were terrified by the glory of the angelic announcement. But in each case, the *“Do not fear”* was to reassure them that God's plans are bigger than their fears, and the message was that God was bringing something extraordinary—Emmanuel, God with us. At Christmas, God’s entrance into the world as a vulnerable baby assures us that He understands our human experience.

Now, we are at the empty tomb. There is initially fear. The time following the crucifixion of Jesus was a confusing and fearful time for the disciples. They expected Jesus to be recognized as king and they anticipated reigning with Him as His inner circle. They saw Him perform miracles and heal multitudes, but then they saw Him arrested and killed. For fear that the same thing would happen to them, they hid. In fact, we're told here that the room the disciples were in was locked because of their fear of being found and potentially captured and killed.

All of Jesus’ followers are probably thinking, it didn’t go how they planned or expected. Jesus just the week prior was riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, the crowds were waving palm branches and shouting his name. He was famous. Things were looking great. The reassurance from the Christmas story was starting to make sense. God promised he was bringing something extraordinary and they saw it with their own eyes as Jesus was riding into Jerusalem as the King of Israel with the crowds shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”” He was being exalted as the King of Israel!

Now, less than a week later from that moment he’s been crucified, many if not all of them are probably fearing for their own lives. They are probably experiencing confusion, fear, doubt. Imagine being a follower of Jesus on Easter morning - after the agony of Good Friday and the uncertainty of Saturday —

feeling like you missed out on the full understanding of Jesus' power. Then Mary Magdalene and the other Mary go to anoint Jesus' body and are met by an angel who says, "Do not fear." There is an empty tomb and told, "Do not fear." And you don't need to hang onto that fear today. Jesus has already defeated death, there's nothing left to fear. **Easter breaks that fear.**

The same Savior who was born in a humble manger to bring peace to the world is the one who died on the cross and rose again to give eternal life. His arrival brought joy to a world waiting for a Savior; His resurrection secures that joy for eternity. The "*Do not fear*" moments from Christmas and Easter point to God's sovereign control over life and death, His power to transform our fear into peace. He crushed all fears and gave us **Hope. Living, breathing, fearless hope.**

From the moment sin was brought into the world, fear came with it. Right after Adam and Eve had eaten from the forbidden tree it says in Genesis 3:8-10 "They [Adam and Eve] heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was **afraid**, because I was naked; and I hid myself."

This moment marks the first human experience of fear, driven by guilt and shame following disobedience. This was the first time humanity feared God, not out of awe and reverence, but because sin had separated them from Him. They feared they had lost something—their place with God. The original FOMO—the fear that they had ruined what was meant for them. And ever since then, fear has been a part of the human experience.

Adam and Eve's relationship with God, which had been characterized by trust and openness, is now marred by fear due to sin. Their fear is rooted in separation from God, a loss of innocence, and the awareness of their vulnerability.

Now, in the context of Mary at the empty tomb there is fear, but it's transformed. She experiences fear because she doesn't understand what has happened—Jesus is gone, and she's uncertain about the meaning of the empty tomb. The fear in this moment is still related to a sense of loss, uncertainty, and perhaps even grief. She is facing a moment of profound change.

Just as God met Adam and Eve with the promise of redemption, in the case of Mary, Jesus meets her in her fear with hope. He calls her by name, “*Mary*.” This act of recognition and the following revelation of His resurrection transform her fear into joy and reassurance. Unlike the fear that leads to hiding from God in Genesis, Mary's fear is met with an invitation to draw near and understand the greater truth of resurrection and life beyond the grave.

Don't miss out on the hope and victory that the resurrection of Jesus offers. Just as we can feel left out when we miss social events or the latest trends, there's a greater spiritual FOMO when you miss the opportunity to experience the transformation that comes from Easter. Jesus offers us a hope that transcends any fear of missing out on life's temporary pleasures. Jesus takes you from fear to freedom. Don't miss the true gift of the resurrection, embrace it for yourself. Jesus' resurrection brings the promise of salvation and eternal life, don't miss out on the eternal joy and peace that comes from knowing Jesus Christ, who rose from the grave to offer us life forever with Him.

The “*Do not fear*” at Christmas calls us to trust in God's plans, even when they are beyond our understanding. It's an invitation to embrace the mystery and wonder of the incarnation, knowing that God is with us. The “*Do not fear*” of Easter is connected to the power and hope of the resurrection. The message at Easter shifts from an angel declaring the presence of Jesus in a humble manger to the declaration that death has been defeated, our King is alive. The fear of death, loss, and uncertainty is overcome by the reality of the risen Christ. **Don't miss out on the greatest truth of all—Jesus is alive, His resurrection changes everything.** No matter what we face in life, including fear of death, we are secure in the resurrected Christ. It assures us that because He lives, we too will live. Jesus has crushed all fears and gives us **Hope. Living, breathing, fearless hope.**

Let us pray,

Heavenly Father, In the moments between the cradle and the cross, and as we await Jesus' return, help us to always know that we can live without fear, help us to always remember that the Savior who came to us in a manger is the same Savior who conquered death and now calls us to live in the power of His resurrection and that Jesus' resurrection defeats fear forever. God, we pray for those who don't yet know You—who are searching, wandering, or maybe not even sure they're searching at all. Open their hearts, Lord. Help them to see the

truth of who You are. Draw them near with Your kindness, Your mercy, and Your love. Don't let them miss the greatest gift of all: a restored relationship with You and the promise of eternity in Your presence. Let today be the day that hope breaks through. And as we speak of hope, joy, love, and peace during Advent, may we remember that all of it is found in Christ Jesus—here and now, today.

In the name of our risen King, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Let us sing a couple of verses of Because He Lives, while the youth band comes up to close out the service.