

This was going to be the cover article for the April Messenger, but given how quickly things are changing, it's doubtful one will get mailed. We share this as an encouragement in these uncertain times. – Pastor Dave

So the women departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. – Matthew 28:8

We live in a time of great fear. Panic about the coronavirus has led to fears about the economy, fears of being near other people. As the next round of elections come near, candidates use fear of what could happen if the other person or other party wins to try to win the most votes.

Fear is a part of the Easter story, too, though we don't always think of it that way. The disciples were afraid, hiding in the upper room, fearing that what happened to Jesus could happen to them, as well. Jesus had been crucified because, among other reasons, the Pharisees feared the popularity of Jesus, and Pontius Pilate feared the unrest that could occur.

The women were afraid when they went to the tomb and discovered it was empty. Even though Jesus had told them what was going to happen, seeing the angel and seeing the stone rolled away was out of their normal experiences, and filled them with fear.

But when the women left to go tell the disciples, they didn't just leave in fear. They left in fear and great joy. They knew that, despite the unknown, that nothing would ever be the same. They knew that Jesus had defeated death, and they no longer needed to fear death.

We too, even when we live in fear, can live in great joy. We know that we no longer need to fear death because Jesus has defeated death. We know that the world was changed forever that first Easter morning.

The most common command in the Bible is the command to not be afraid. "Fear not" are the first words of almost every angelic messenger. In every instance, people faced legitimate fears. Things out of the ordinary were happening, big changes were coming. But each time God's message remained consistent. One scholar notes there are 366 "fear not" verses in the Bible – one for every day of the year, including one for a leap year!

The command to "fear not" comes with a promise; God's presence. When Jesus rose from the dead, he promised he would always be with his people. That promise applies to us, too. It gives us great joy in the midst of fear. -DRB