

Matthew 28:1-10

Earthquakes do not happen on their own. Something causes them to happen. When there is movement of the earth's plates deep underground, seismic waves cause the surface of the earth to shake. The cause, therefore, cannot be seen since it is miles down within the earth.

"Behold," we're told, *"there was a great earthquake"* early on Easter morning, and the epicenter was the tomb of Jesus. As with all earthquakes, what caused this one could not be seen. The cause of this quake did not come from deep within the earth. It was from heaven. An angel rolled back the stone from the tomb, for Jesus had risen from the dead.

No one rejoices when there is an earthquake. People become afraid. And so we see the guards at the tomb trembling with fear; at the earthquake, but even more, at the angel. The women, too, were afraid. But when they heard from the angel what caused the earthquake, in with their fear they rejoiced in their hearts.

Did you feel the earthquake this morning? Is that what woke you up so early, got you out of bed, and brought you to church on this Easter Sunday? And you're asking yourself: "Was there an earthquake?" Yes, there was. It shook the earth violently nearly 2,000 years ago, and still today we feel its aftershocks.

And that is why we are here. The quake's epicenter is right here, the same place it was on that first Easter; at that place where the stone of sin and death has been rolled away; where the risen Lord triumphs over the grave.

The guards ran from the earthquake and from God's angel. But you have come to the very epicenter; to where God's angel, His messenger, stands before you with the joyous news of the resurrection. You are not like the guards in running away on Easter morning. Rather, you are like the women. They came with their egg casseroles...well, maybe not, but they did come and there was fear in them.

Is there some fear in you? Of course there is. Sin causes fear. Troubles and afflictions cause fear. The future, being unknown to us, causes fear. If you have some discomfort being here, you are just like the women. If you're not really sure why you're here, you have a lot in common with the women. Even if you're thinking, "I don't belong here," you are more like the women than you realize.

The angel did not rake these women over the coals and give them the third degree. He opened his mouth to speak the words: *"Do not be afraid."* It seems like God's angels are always saying that. *"Do not be afraid,"* said the angel to Joseph in a dream. *"Do not be afraid,"* said the angel to Zacharias in the temple. *"Do not be afraid,"* said the angel Gabriel to Mary. *"Do not be afraid,"* said the angel to the shepherds. God's angels love to tell sinful people, *"Do not be afraid."*

Well, then, my fellow sinners...this messenger (for the word *angel* means messenger) is here before you today to say to you, *"Do not be afraid."* Whatever has caused you to have fear in your heart, that which caused the earthquake is greater. God's mercy is greater than that which

caused your fear. His mercy sent Jesus to the cross for you, and His mercy raised Him from the dead for you also. Your fears come because, like me, you are a sinner. Jesus took care of that. You have fears because you are not stronger than affliction, disease, and death. Jesus took care of that for you.

The angel did not tell the women: “*Do not be afraid*” of some things, or even most things in your life.” He said, “*Do not be afraid...period!*” All of your troubles are temporary. Your sin is forgiven. Death has lost its sting. This is what Jesus’ resurrection means.

This word is for you. It was for the women. But it was not for the guards on that Easter morning. They heard no message of peace from the angel. The angel did not say to the guards, “*Do not be afraid.*” Jesus had died also for them. His resurrection was also for them. But they ran away from the messenger. The word of the Gospel was for them, too. But in running away, they took their ears with them. And so no joyful news was given to them, and they continued to live in fear.

There is no good news apart from the Risen Christ. There is no Easter apart from the message of the resurrection. There is no forgiveness apart from the washing of Holy Baptism; apart from the word of forgiveness placed into your ears. There is no Risen Christ apart from His words of life; apart from where He meets us in the Sacrament of His body and blood. But in these holy things there is good news, there is the joy of Easter, there is forgiveness and new life in the Risen Christ.

And so, because the aftershocks of the Easter earthquake continue today, those who are like the guards continue to run away, and will live in fear; fear of God, fear of the future, fear of death. No good news will be given to them, for they stay away from it, even though it truly is for them.

But those who are like the women continue to come to the epicenter of the quake, and not just on Easter, but as often as the Risen Christ comes in the Sacrament of His body and blood. If the earthquake of Easter has shaken up your life, then this will be evident; for where there is faith, there are its fruits.

Day by day, Easter’s aftershocks will continue within you and through you, for the Risen Christ does not just dwell as a memory in your mind. He lives in your heart, and He lives through your mouth, your hands, and your feet.

No earthquake happens on its own, and no aftershocks happen on their own. God caused the Easter earthquake, and He is the cause of the daily aftershocks in your life. God did not give you the Risen Christ in your Baptism so that you would be like the guards and live in fear. He has given you new life, forgiveness, and the Holy Spirit so that you are like the women; who return again and again to the epicenter of the Easter earthquake; who live with the joyous message of the Risen Christ in your ears and filling your entire body.

“He is risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**” Amen.