

**Easter Year A  
Matthew 28:1-10  
April 23/24, 2011**

**Be afraid. Be very afraid.**

**Remember that line? It came from a horror movie in the '80s, a movie called *The Fly*. In the film, Jeff Goldblum plays a scientist who has developed a transporter machine, and he's trying to get his girlfriend, played by Geena Davis, to try it out. It's OK to get in the transporter, he tells her. Don't be afraid.**

**And then she turns on him and says, "No. Be afraid. Be very afraid."**

**And so upon this Easter, in the year of our Lord 2011, as we come to celebrate the feast of the Resurrection, I bring you this warning.**

**Be afraid. Be very afraid.**

***Now come on! you might be thinking. This is Easter. This is good news. This is joy and celebration and singing and shouting of Alleluia and He is Risen. This is all about new life, about flowers blooming and trees leafing out and pollen flying and peepers making the marshes ring in the night. This is the celebration of the end of a long, dark winter, a late and endless Lent. And you tell us to be afraid???***

**Yes. Be afraid. Be very afraid.**

**We have come here to sing and pray and shout and proclaim and celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We have come here to assert once more that in this person of Jesus of Nazareth ... in his life, in his ministry, in his teachings and most importantly in his open-armed, non-violent, forgiving and loving embrace of a horrible death ... that God was made visible to us in a human form. In a way that is unique and unrepeatable in all of human history.**

**And that Jesus' faithful living, faithful working, faithful healing, preaching, and teaching, faithful suffering and death, were all vindicated by God. The world said "No" to Jesus. And it killed him.**

**But God said "Yes" to Jesus. And raised him from the dead.**

**Are you afraid? If you are not afraid, you are not paying attention.**

**Because resurrection is not normal. Dead things stay dead. If you have lost a beloved parent, partner, friend or child, you know this. They are not coming back. Their bodies were buried, their ashes were scattered, their physical presence is no more, and we make our peace with that. We grieve and move on from that.**

**Resurrection is not normal. The power of governments and armies and police and authorities make sure that things or ideas or people they decide need to die, shall die. And not return to make trouble. The human vision of power and wealth and dominance and vengeance and law and order must be maintained. And many of us find a comfortable home there, where the streets are quiet, and we are not troubled by uncomfortable people, uncomfortable ideas, or uncomfortable dilemmas. And we collude in all those thousand little deaths that keep the world working in a way that works for us. And nothing changes.**

**Resurrection is not normal. And so we soothe each other and ourselves with platitudes. That's just the way it is. Some things will never change. Life's not fair, get used to it. What goes around, comes around. Tomorrow is another day. Pull yourself up by your own bootstraps. God helps those who help themselves. Nothing is certain in this world but death and taxes. Que sera, sera. Whatever ...**

**Two women went in the darkness to sit at a graveside. Two women went to accept and acknowledge the death of their friend -- to weep, to wail, to grieve. Two women went knowing that the big guys always win ... Rome wins, the religious authorities win, hate and fear and anxiety win. Two women went expecting nothing but a silent stone, hard, huge, final.**

**They didn't go there looking for a second chance with Jesus. They didn't go there looking for a miraculous resuscitation. They didn't go there thinking about resurrection.**

**Because resurrection is not normal. It is not what you expect, after the powers of this world have had their way and you have laid the beloved flesh of your friend in the tomb.**

**Well, you know what happened next. You just heard the story. Bam! An earthquake! Whoa! An angel! No way! The stone rolled away, the tomb revealed to be empty, the Roman guards shaking in their sandals and passing out from fear.**

**The author of Matthew's gospel is big on the special effects. But you know, it's not the special effects that are so terrifying. It's the fact that the tomb is empty. That the man who was dead is proclaimed to be alive, out there playing hopscotch or skipping up the road to Galilee. He was crucified. He was dead. But now he is raised. He is alive.**

**The soldiers are *paralyzed* with the realization. Frozen in their fear. The soldiers have always stood upon those powers -- the strength of empire, the dominance of violence and force, the finality of death. They now have nothing to stand upon. They fall to the ground like dead men, paralyzed by fear.**

**The women, though ... the women! They are *energized* by their fear, filled with fear and great joy as they race from the tomb, encounter the risen Christ and seize him, worship him, grab hold of all the possibilities exploding out of this amazing turn of events.**

**The only possible reaction to resurrection is to be afraid. Be very afraid. Because what you always thought, what the world has always told you to be true ... is wrong.**

**Be afraid, because if Jesus is raised, then all the old rules are wrong. Be afraid, because if Jesus is raised, then the powers of this world are powerless.**

**Be afraid, because if Jesus is raised, than nothing can come between us and God's love – not wounds, not death, not powers, not rulers, not our own hateful selfishness, not the cruelty of others. No hate, no evil, no taunting, no torture, no betrayal, no imprisonment, no disease, no loss, no crime, no authorities, no bullies, no bandits, no lost hope, no shattered dreams get the last word. Any more. Ever again.**

**And the question for us today is ... when we are confronted with a God who acts like THIS, who will go to any lengths, use any means necessary, to crack human existence open like an egg and let in love and life and joy and light and power and possibility and grace and wonder ... when the reality of resurrection explodes into our lives, denying the power of death, overruling the status quo, embracing every single human being ... the rich and the poor, the staid and the freaks, the straight and the gay, the black and the brown, the pink and the pale, the addicts and the millionaires, the parents and the children, the thieves and the judges ... when God comes embracing each one with complete and total forgiveness and acceptance...**

**When confronted with a God like this, what will we do? Be afraid, very afraid ... yes. But will we allow that fear to paralyze us? Will we leave here today unchanged, undisturbed, locked into our old lives, our old patterns, our old habits and crutches and tricks? Will we be paralyzed by the possibility of resurrection?**

**Or will we allow this outrageous, impossible, unquenchable God to meet us as we leave, to energize us with the promise that life can be different, that our world can be different, that we ourselves can be different ... because Christ is alive?**

**Either way, we are going to be afraid. Very afraid. Because Christ is alive. And if this frisky, feisty, resurrected Jesus gets his hands on us, then nothing ... nothing will ever be the same.**